A CRITIQUE OF SOME OF WILLIAM J. BENNETT'S VIEWS ON
POLITICS, CULTURE, AND VALUES IN SCHOOLING AND SOCIETY

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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* * * * *

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In this study I offered a critique of some of William J. Bennett's views on politics, culture and values in schooling and society. The methodology of critique relies heavily on the critical tools and approaches of analytic and normative philosophy as well as bringing in the relevant findings of history, social sciences, and literary theory. I first examined Bennett's views on the politics of the culture wars. I argue that Bennett acts as a preacher of creedal politics. I then examined Bennett's arguments for the primacy and centrality of Western culture in the humanities curriculum. Finally, I discuss some of Bennett's views on values and moral education.

I found Bennett's views on the politics of the culture wars to be inaccurate and tendentious. I did conclude, however, that Bennett must be regarded as one of the most significant and influential leaders of the conservative political movement. His continuing influence and importance hinges largely on whether or not he seeks to run for President. Bennett's calls for a curricular emphasis on content, and for the promotion of cultural literacy are commendable. However, Bennett's arguments for the superiority of Western culture are flawed, and they have anti-educational consequences in theory and practice. Bennett has been an important figure in popularizing the discussion of moral education. His criticisms of non-directive approaches to moral education are well taken, but there are significant philosophical problems with Bennett's views on the existence of objective morality and his contentions on the manifest clarity of the basics of morality. It also remains to be seen whether Bennett's approach to character education will be an effective method of promoting virtue in students, and the virtues he prescribes may be more controversial than he acknowledges.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In this work I will offer a critique of William J. Bennett's views on politics, culture, and values in schooling and society. In this introductory chapter I will first offer reasons why Bennett's views on these matters warrant our attention. I will then offer an account of my methodology. This will be followed by some claims on the purpose of the study, along with some comments on personal considerations. I will then offer a review of the literature. Finally, I will state the limitations of the study, and present an outline of the organization of the study.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The political, philosophical, and pedagogical debates concerning culture and values in schooling and society have taken a highly visible and aggressive turn in recent public discourse. This public debate has been characterized as a competition between two opposing political-cultural factions. This clash has been dubbed "The Culture War." The subtitle of Bennett's book *The De-Valuing of America* is "The Fight for Our Culture and Our Children." He writes in the preface of the book, "We are in the midst of a struggle over whose values will prevail in America. This book is about that struggle."¹ Conservative radio commentator Rush Limbaugh gives this endorsement of the book: "If you are concerned about the culture war that is going on, and if you are concerned about the future of your children and the battle for their minds that you know is going on, *The De-Valuing of America* is a great read."²

Critics and writers on the left have also acknowledged this cultural schism, and some have adopted this military motif in their works. For example, Ira Shor has recently written a book entitled *Culture Wars: School and Society in The Conservative Restoration*.³ The phrase "conservative restoration" has been used by Shor, Michael Apple, and others on the left to refer to the growing influence of political conservatives in
shaping public policy and practice in the last two decades. They view this conservative
movement as a backlash against the gains made by minorities, women, labor unions,
gays and lesbians, and other groups on the margins of society during the Sixties and
Seventies. Michael Apple offers this characterization of the growing conservative
influence:

A new alliance has been formed, one that has increasing power in
educational and social policy. This power bloc combines business
with the New Right and with neoconservative intellectuals. Its
interests lie not in increasing the life chances of women, people of color,
or labor. Rather, it aims at providing the educational conditions believed
necessary both for increasing international competitiveness, profit, and
discipline and for returning us to a romanticized past of the "ideal" home,
family, and school.  

Apple notes that the influence of conservatives on educational policy can be seen
in "the increasingly effective attacks on the school curriculum for its antifamily and
anti-free enterprise 'bias', its secular humanism, its lack of patriotism, and its supposed
neglect of the knowledge and values of the 'Western tradition' and of 'real knowledge'."

This characterization certainly applies to the positions which have been
advanced by William J. Bennett. In the so-called culture wars, Bennett is a significant
and influential participant. He is a highly visible and well known commentator on
matters of public policy. Bennett is a popular author, whose books The De-Valuing of
America and The Book of Virtues were best sellers. He is also a frequent guest and
commentator on radio and television shows. In addition, he has been the subject of
extensive attention from the press. Though often the object of criticism and controversy,
Bennett's views have at times been given a favorable spin. For example, he has recently
been featured in national periodicals in stories titled "Bill Bennett's Virtuous Reality,"
"Virtue Man," and "The Virtuecrats." PBS is currently producing an animated television
series based on The Book of Virtues.

Another reason Bennett warrants our attention is that he has played an
important role in formulating and implementing public policy. Much of this activity has
been concerned with matters of public school policy. During the Reagan and Bush
administrations, Bennett served as chairman of the National Endowment for the
Humanities (1981-84), Secretary of Education (1985-88), and Director of the Office of
National Drug Control Policy (1989-90). He is often mentioned as a potential
presidential or vice-presidential candidate. He is currently involved with the
organization Empower America, which he co-founded with Jack Kemp. Under the auspices of Empower America, Bennett has launched a campaign against what he takes to be the gratuitous violence and obscenity in films and pop music, most notably rap music. As I am writing this, Bennett has been engaged in a much publicized campaign against daytime television talk shows, which he has labeled "trash" and "rot."

While serving in these positions, Bennett has used his public office as a "bully pulpit". He has placed great emphasis on initiating and engaging in the public debate on culture and values in schooling and society. Much of Bennett's writing and public speech has an unashamedly aggressive polemic tone. He portrays our social institutions as being controlled by a hostile, ineffective, and ill-founded liberal ideology. He writes, "Today fewer and fewer people are swayed by cultural nihilism and leftist social policy. But though the emperor has no clothes, he still has an empire. A number of critical American institutions are still under liberal tutelage." Bennett unhesitantly assumes the task of "fighting the good fight," by spearheading the public debate in an attempt to reclaim "our" culture. Bennett has set forth the following challenge:

Reclaiming our institutions is less a political opportunity than a civic obligation. At the end of the day, somebody's values will prevail. In America, "we the people" have a duty to insist that our institutions and our government be true to their time-honored tasks. In some instances that means that the American people must roll up their sleeves and work to ensure that their institutions and government reflect their sentiments, their good sense, their sense of right and wrong. This is what a democracy--a government of, by, and for the people--is all about. The debate has been joined. But the fight for our values has just begun.8

I agree with Bennett that the debate over values and culture in our schools and society is deserving of careful attention. I am sympathetic with Bennett's contention that we have a civic obligation to examine these issues, and I would add that Bennett's arguments on these matters are of sufficient professional concern and personal interest to warrant the scrutiny of a novice philosopher of education like myself. Therefore, the problem which will be addressed in this study can be stated as follows: Given Bennett's significant and influential arguments on social and educational theory, policy and practice, what are we to make of his views? In an attempt to address this question I will offer a critical examination of some of Bennett's arguments on these matters.
METHODOLOGY

We learn from Aristotle that a methodology must be appropriate to the subject being studied.\(^9\) I have characterized this study as a critique of Bennett’s claims and arguments. I am not using the term ‘critique’ in a strict technical sense, but rather in a general sense, to refer to an approach to criticism whereby I attempt to assess and evaluate Bennett’s claims by utilizing the relevant and appropriate tools of criticism with which I am familiar. In doing this critique I will rely heavily on the tools and approaches of analytic and normative philosophy. The first reason for choosing a methodology of critique is that it seems to be a means of assessment and examination which is appropriate to the nature of Bennett’s public discourse. Though trained as a philosopher, Bennett seldom writes or speaks as a philosopher.\(^10\) His writings might best be characterized as policy arguments, and as exercises in ideological and political rhetoric.\(^11\) As such, they are not subject to the canons of assessment generally applied to works of philosophy, nor would a strictly philosophical analysis be the appropriate means by which to evaluate his claims. For example, when considering Bennett’s arguments for moral education, it would not be appropriate to fault him for failing to articulate or operate from a fully developed ethical theory. However, his positions on moral education do involve certain philosophical beliefs, assumptions, and positions, and are thus subject to philosophical examination.

At the same time, my critique of Bennett will rely heavily on the application of the tools of philosophical inquiry which have been the staples of philosophers of education in the analytic tradition.\(^12\) These acts of philosophical inquiry involve the application of linguistic and logical tools to the examination of educational issues. The philosophical tools of critical analysis which I will employ in this study include: conceptual analysis, identification and examination of assumptions underlying normative claims, identification of formal and informal fallacies in reasoning, detection of programmatic definitions presented in place of reasoned argument, identification of ambiguities and inconsistencies, and making distinctions. Bennett’s claims will be assessed as to whether he provides sufficient and appropriate evidence, support and justification for them. Critical analysis of slogans and metaphors will also be employed. Though many of these activities are primarily concerned with achieving conceptual
clarity, they also include a critical dimension in that they involve the assessment of arguments, the evaluation and interpretation of claims, and the making of informed judgments.

The analytic tradition in philosophy of education has been criticized on several fronts. Early criticisms included the charge that analytic philosophers of education were pursuing a sterile, narrow, abstract methodological approach, at the expense of attention to the grand normative questions which had traditionally concerned philosophers. Another charge was that the analytic approach offered little in the way of guidance or direction for the practicing teacher. In the last two decades, challenges to analytic philosophy have come from several rival approaches. "Post-modernists, poststructuralists, feminists, Marxists, and post-Marxists questioned the basic assumptions of analytic philosophy of education, particularly its claim to mere description and neutrality."13 In his book Philosophy of Education--Two Traditions, Richard Pratte refers to these projects as "the normative tradition" in philosophy of education. Among the emphases of the normative tradition have been the insistence that moral principles, language, and rationality are--and must be understood and examined as--social constructions of particular social, economic, political, institutional, cultural and historical relations. Thus the normative tradition has often been positioned in opposition to the analytic tradition, which has been charged with operating on an "overly narrow and discriminatory model of 'pure' rational thinking, a tradition that perpetuated a 'so-called' neutral, impartial, and universal point of view, freed from partisanship, partiality and onesidedness, that otherwise affects us."14

Though there is surely something to these criticisms, I am of the opinion that the methodology used in the analytic tradition has much to offer. Moreover, I feel the tools of analytic philosophy can be useful in my critique of Bennett. If nothing else--and this is no mean feat--the tools of philosophical analysis provide a useful means with which to clarify and "map out" the often confused and imprecise discourse on education. Without making the pretense that analytic philosophy involves an impartial set of skills that can be universally applied, I can confidently state that the analytic method of philosophical inquiry can be fruitfully applied to most discourses, including Bennett's. In fact, a good case can be made that an analytic approach is a necessary precondition for making informed critical judgments on policy arguments and political rhetoric. In
other words, philosophical analysis enables us to achieve a degree of "clarity before commitment." That is, a degree of clarity must be achieved before committing to substantive and normative judgments.

Though utilizing analytic skills of philosophical inquiry in my critique, I will also appeal to the relevant findings and insights of various social sciences and academic and professional disciplines. For example, in my review of the literature on Bennett I found criticisms from: literary theory, anthropology, quantitative educational research, ethnic studies, secondary school teachers, social and political commentators, journalists, and educational theorists. Many studies and books concerning the social, political, economic, and cultural conditions relevant to Bennett's career have also been examined. Several of these works have proven to be helpful in understanding the social forces that have shaped Bennett's views, as well as helping me to evaluate the consequences and implications of Bennett's policy arguments. Particularly helpful in this regard have been the recent works of critical educational theorists such as Michael Apple, Ira Shor, and Henry Giroux. These writers provide us with critical examinations of the culture wars, and the conservative movement's growing influence in educational policy and practice. These critical theorists might be classified as operating in the normative tradition in the philosophy of education, while on the other hand, some might not consider their work to be properly labeled philosophy of education at all.

For my purposes, I am not interested in achieving methodological purity (e.g. performing a strictly analytic study). As stated earlier, such an approach would not be appropriate to the subject being studied, and the quest for methodological purity would seem too restrictive in that it might function to exclude the valuable insights and relevant findings of various disciplines and modes of critical inquiry. In performing my critique I do not feel compelled to establish that the work of these critical educational theorists counts as philosophy of education, or that I need to fully subscribe to any of these approaches. However, I have found their work to be stimulating, intriguing, and informative. As such, I will utilize their findings in my critique of Bennett.

My characterization of many of Bennett's arguments as policy arguments, as well as my approach of offering a critique as opposed to a strict philosophical analysis have been roughly modeled on a work by philosopher of education, James E. McClellan, Toward an Effective Critique of American Education. In that work, McClellan offers a
critique of the educational policy arguments of five individuals: James Bryant Conant, Theodore Bramfield, Jacques Barzun, B.F. Skinner, and Paul Goodman. McClellan's conception of policy argument is heavily rooted in his conception of politics. According to McClellan, "a problem or issue belongs in the realm of politics only if there is more than one real or genuine interest involved." And he defines a political order as "one way of creating concert in action from conflict in interest." Policies, then, are those adopted and enforced rules or principles which guide and direct a political order. Put simply, policy arguments are those claims and arguments about what our political and social institutions should do.\textsuperscript{18} I feel the bulk of Bennett's arguments can accurately be described as policy arguments, and they will be assessed as such. Though Bennett introduces several of his articles and speeches with the disclaimer that they are not intended as "formal policy arguments," I think he means by this that they are not intended as legally mandated formal statements of detailed public policy. I am confident he would not object to characterizing his arguments as normative prescriptions for social and educational policy.

Many of Bennett's claims might also be characterized as exercises in political and ideological rhetoric. By this I simply mean that many of Bennett's claims are intended to advance his conservative political ideology in the arena of public discourse. His ideological rhetoric serves this function in several ways. It functions to select and define the objects of public debate, as well as the terminology with which matters of social and educational policy are debated. In other words, when Bennett chooses to discuss a particular problem in education, and he labels the matter as being a "moral" or "spiritual" problem, then the critic is at least initially obligated to discuss the issue in terms of it being a moral or spiritual problem. In his public discourse, Bennett is making a conscious attempt to frame the debate in his own ideological terms, and to gain broad popular acceptance for his conservative ideological positions.

What I am attempting to call attention to here, is simply the recognition that the language and terminology employed in public discourse is a matter of contention. As one writer has put it, "The sphere of symbolic production is a contested terrain just as other spheres of social life are. The circle of dominant ideas does accumulate the symbolic power to map or classify the world for others, to set limits on what appears rational and reasonable, indeed on what appears sayable and thinkable."\textsuperscript{19} In his
book Contested Truths: Keywords In American Politics Since Independence, Daniel T. Rodgers offers an engaging historical account about the social and political conflicts concerning such words and phrases as 'self-evident truths', 'popular sovereignty', 'interests', and 'the rule of law'. In Bennett's rhetoric we find he often employs contested terminology. Terms such as 'educational excellence', 'equality', 'common culture', 'liberal elites', 'objective standards', 'educational reform', and 'Judeo-Christian ethic' have strong evaluative baggage, and the careful critic must recognize this and take note of cases where Bennett is appropriating and applying these terms of approbation and condemnation. An attempt must be made to determine "what is going on" with this particular use of language. What is at stake? And, how is this use of language functioning in Bennett's arguments?

In the literature on the culture wars, it has been argued that the realm of language and symbolic production is at the core of the conflict. In his book Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America, James Davison Hunter comments on this matter: "As with all other expressions of cultural antagonism, this conflict is 'about' the uses of symbols, the uses of language, and the right to impose discrediting labels upon those who would dissent. It is ultimately a struggle over the right to define the way things are and the way things should be." Critics on the left have placed great emphasis on assessing the ideological rhetoric of Bennett and his conservative soul mates.

In his recent book, Official Knowledge: Democratic Education in a Conservative Age, Michael Apple addresses this ideological mission being waged by the Right. He contends that conservatives have been successful in achieving a popular ideological consensus, a hegemonic accord. Apple argues that the current legitimization of the Right's ideological vision should not be regarded as some insidious infusion of false consciousness into the unthinking minds of the polity, but rather is the result of the careful rearticulation, on the part of the Right, of traditional political and cultural themes in a way that has connected with, and spoken to the needs, fears, and desires of many American citizens. Commenting on this ideological mission, Apple writes:

The Right, then, has set itself an immense task, to create a truly "organic ideology," one that seeks to spread throughout society and to create a new form of "national popular will." It seeks to intervene "on the terrain of ordinary, contradictory common-sense," to "interrupt, renovate, and transform in a more systematic direction" people's practical consciousness. It is this restructuring of common-sense, which is itself the already complex and contradictory result of previous struggles and
accords, which becomes the object of the cultural battles now being waged.  

Stanley Fish has argued that much of the rhetoric employed by conservatives involves the use of "coded language." For example, in his essays "Speaking in Code, or, How to Turn Bigotry and Ignorance into Moral Principles," and "Reverse Racism, or, How the Pot Got to Call the Kettle Black" (both are included in There's No Such Thing as Free Speech . . . and it's a good thing too). Fish contends that conservative criticisms of political correctness, affirmative action and multiculturalism (each of which is a common target for Bennett), are often framed in terms of equality and fairness, but these words are at times "merely stand-ins for prejudicial attitudes that could no longer be openly displayed but could be displayed under cover of a sanitized vocabulary that proclaimed the ideological innocence of its users." For example, appeals to Martin Luther King's dream of a society where men are "not judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character," have been invoked by conservatives--including Bennett--as a challenge to affirmative action: "How can it be racist to be for equality?" or, "My objection is simply to preferential treatment for anyone." "I am all in favor of civil rights, I am just against quotas," or, "I just want decisions to be made on a basis that is fair." I should note that I am not at this point indicting Bennett for using coded language. I am simply bringing in Fish's criticisms to illustrate one of the prominent issues of contention involving the ideological rhetoric of the culture wars.

In commenting on Bennett's political and ideological rhetoric, critics have characterized Bennett as a politician, a preacher, an ideologue, an apologist, a demagogue, a hatchet man for the Reagan administration, a romantic sentimentalist, a moralist, and a "virtue cop". One thing these characterizations call attention to is that Bennett's hortatory rhetoric is replete with slogans, shibboleths, catchwords, homilies, and homey anecdotes. Students of political rhetoric have noted that the most effective slogans function to achieve a broad consensus, intimidate people from disagreement, stress prescription over description, and because of their superficial nature many slogans obfuscate the problems that may arise when we attempt to enact the slogan's injunctions. For example, few educators are against "educational excellence" or "educational reform," and what educator or politician in her right mind
would dare argue against the slogan "just say no." for fear of being perceived as "soft on drugs."

In an attempt to critique Bennett's rhetoric in this regard, it may be useful to heed the suggestions of philosopher Israel Scheffler. In his book The Language of Education, Scheffler describes a critical procedure he calls "the dual analysis of slogans." In analyzing slogans, Scheffler suggests that we examine both the literal and practical purport of the slogan. First, we apply the tools of logical and conceptual clarification to the slogan. However, even if it is determined that a slogan does not meet standards of logical and conceptual rigor (many slogans are literally vacuous or tautological), we can not immediately dismiss them. We also need to examine the slogan's practical purport. In doing this we need to inquiry into the slogan's social origin (e.g. the "parent doctrine" which spawned the slogan), the practical considerations in implementing the slogan, the social aim the slogan is attempting to achieve, and the practical consequences of the slogan's implementation.

In a similar vein, regarding how we might evaluate the rhetoric of the debates over the "politicization" of the college curriculum, Stanley Fish urges attention to the practical consequences which the contesting rhetorics might entail. "In the end, however, I prefer the quieter tones of pragmatic inquiry: what is to be gained or lost in our everyday lives as students and teachers by either welcoming or rejecting various new emphases and methodologies urged on us by various constituencies? Unlike questions posed in the timeless language of philosophical abstractions, this is a question one can answer." Fish then spells out what he contends would be the likely results of a curriculum emphasizing diversity and the likely results of a curriculum modeled on the views of conservatives such as Bennett. Weighing the possible results of the alternative positions, Fish—in his inimitable style—concludes: "I know what I like. In the words of the old song, how about you?"28

As does Fish, educational theorist Michael Apple also calls attention to the role of personal/political interests in the way he positions himself in his critique of conservative educational policy. "Much of what I say here is critical, for I position myself in opposition to much of what is becoming institutionalized as official policy in this society. The program of criticism and renewal I avow interprets education relationally, as having intimate connections both to the structures of inequalities in this society and
to attempts to overcome them.”

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS

I am well aware, that given these citations from Fish, Apple, and Shor, some may object that I am engaging in a form of critique that is too “political.” It might be argued that such approaches involve the reduction of the assessment of public claims to matters of particular interests, arbitrary preferences, and to the issue of “whose ox is being gored.” In such cases the label “political” is often applied in a pejorative sense. For example, the Little League baseball coach who retains his son on the team and cuts better players is charged with “playing politics.” Recent charges against House Speaker Newt Gingrich have included the accusation that his correspondence course Renewing American Civilization was used to promote partisan political purposes rather than to achieve educational goals. When used in this pejorative sense, ‘political’ connotes the idea that such endeavors involve an appeal to personal interests at the expense of objectivity, generally agreed upon methods of assessment, disinterested inquiry, and procedural fairness. In addition, some may charge that too close of an identification with a particular political position reduces public dialogue and the work of the critic to a vulgar exercise in dogmatic apologetics; Or to quote Socrates’ interlocutor Thrasyvoulos, “justice is nothing else than the interest of the stronger”; Or to cite the old dog food commercial, “my dog is better than your dog.”

I admit that there is some force to these objections. Particularly in cases where the critic’s political interests are not acknowledged, and in cases where the critic does allow his political interests to influence him to “fudge” on the facts and to play “fast and loose” with the methods of critical inquiry to which both he and the subject of his study would agree on. For example, most of us would agree that critical inquiry should strive for accuracy in presenting the claims of our subject as well as rejecting prejudicial readings. In regard to these points I would like to state one of the initial purposes of this study. Namely, to accurately set forth Bennett’s positions.

In the highly charged debates of the culture wars, it is a common complaint from both sides that their opponents are guilty of mischaracterizing their views. From Bennett and others on the right this complaint often takes the form of accusations of misrepresentations against the liberal media and liberal academics. Those on the left
often accuse conservatives of mischaracterizing their work by using selective quotations and ridiculing the eccentric titles of academic journal articles and course titles, without honestly examining their contents. In an article titled "Public Speech," philosopher of education Thomas F. Green bemoans this increasing incidence of intransigent polarization in public debate. He suggests that for public speech to function effectively, the interlocutors must abide by what he calls "the auditory principle." According to this principle, "public speech occurs when what is said in one person's speech is heard by others as candidates for their own speech."31

Green argues that such genuine public speech is often impeded by three fallacies in the assessment and conduct of public speech: fallacies of role and position, fallacies of explanation, and fallacies of misplaced discourse. For example, I would be committing the fallacy of role and position in my critique of Bennett, if I were to argue that Bennett is making a particular claim simply "because he is a conservative," or "because he is a Republican," or "because he is a Catholic." According to Green, such arguments "constitute not simply a failure to enter into public speech, but a quite explicit refusal to do so, a declaration that one will not entertain the speech of another as candidate for one's own."32 If in critiquing Bennett I were to come to a conclusion that "I now understand Bennett, his views can be explained as the bitter rantings of a frustrated mediocre academic who has been given a public platform by political appointment." then I would be committing the fallacy of explanation.33 Green likens the fallacy of explanation to a therapist who explains a client in terms of antecedent psychological episodes. The therapist might be said to have explained the client's behavior and perhaps it can even be said that the therapist understands the client, but this exchange does not constitute genuine public speech because the therapist is not entertaining the speech of the other as a candidate for her own. The fallacy of misplaced discourse simply involves the recognition that the form of assessment must be appropriate to the type of speech assessed.34

Green's fallacies of public speech are quite similar to two other fallacies which are often mentioned in textbooks on logic and argument: the ad hominem fallacy, and the genetic fallacy.35 However, even novice philosophers will recognize that there are cases where a consideration of the source or origin of an argument is appropriate. It has been
argued by Richard Garner that there may be cases where invoking the *genetic fallacy*
may itself be a fallacy. In his discussion of the origins of religious morality, Garner
states: "To think that information about the source of a belief is irrelevant, and should
in fact be ignored, is to commit the genetic fallacy fallacy, the mistake of thinking that
considerations about the origin of a belief ought to have no bearing on whether we
accept it."36

I have "gone-on" a bit in my attempt to explain what might appear to be the
simple and clear-cut purposes of this study. Namely, to offer an accurate description
and fair assessment of Bennett's views. However, this is no easy chore, and it involves a
complex and difficult balancing act. I seek to strike a happy medium and to avoid what I
take to be "extreme" critical stances. For example, I reject the view that I can divest
myself of personal considerations and act as an "ideal observer" making "disinterested"
judgments of arguments that are abstracted from particular situations in order to assess
the arguments "on their own merits." Yet at the same time I acknowledge the pitfalls of
an approach to criticism which is too "political." For example, dismissing Bennett's
views simply because they reflect a particular social or political position, and the danger
of allowing my own political interests and commitments to dictate a rigid dogmatic
proclamation of my own views. In my critique of Bennett's views I hope to achieve an
integration of critical skepticism with respect,37 and a spirit of good will, with an ear
toward dialogue and understanding.

These concerns are nothing new in the history of philosophy and social
criticism. Wrestling with the issues of particularity and universality, distance and
involvement, reason and passion, have been perennial concerns of philosophers and
critics as they have developed models and methods of criticism and have articulated
their critical stances. We can learn much from these individuals' intellectual struggles.
In *The Company of Critics*, Michael Walzer explores the tension between critical distance
and active involvement. "The distance the critic establishes--or, better, the distance he
has to establish--also varies a great deal, sometimes with reference to the doctrines he
takes to be true, sometimes with reference to the institutions and practices he wants to
criticize. Critical distance is contested territory, and the critic's claim to stand apart
always has to be examined critically."38
In one of his finest sermons, "Strength to Love," Martin Luther King, Jr. takes up the biblical injunction that we should be "wise as serpents, and gentle as doves." What he is endorsing here is an effective integration of intellectual rigor and enlightened compassion and empathy. Israel Scheffler advances a similar argument in the book *In Praise of The Cognitive Emotions*. In this work, Scheffler disputes the age-old dichotomy of rationality and emotionality, and he urges educators to strive for the cultivation of rationally informed emotions such as "love of learning" and "anger at injustice." Hence, Scheffler's ideal critic is not one who is devoid of emotions, but rather is passionately committed to the exercise of reason and the pursuit of understanding.

We see this same theme in Cornell West's model of "prophetic criticism," in which he argues that education must "foster credible sensibilities for an active critical citizenry," and must encourage the rigorous criticism which enables us to "demystify the categories in order to stay tuned to the complexity of the realities." West calls for "prophetic thinkers and prophetic activists who are willing to hold up human hypocrisy, including their own, and also willing to hold up the possibility of human hope." And finally I would like to mention Walter Kaufmann's work *The Faith of a Heretic*, for his treatment of the dispositions, attitudes, and characteristic habits of mind which facilitate effective philosophical inquiry. Particularly stimulating is his discussion of the relation of commitment and honesty to social and philosophical criticism.

One final note on some personal considerations. In earlier drafts of this work I had considered pursuing a self-ascribed "political" approach to my examination of Bennett. By this I meant that I had commitments, beliefs, and interests which I felt were at odds with the views and proposals offered by Bennett. I also felt that I should position myself according to these commitments, in blatant opposition to Bennett. To a large extent, I have "toned down" such an approach, due to the reasons discussed above. At the same time, I am thoroughly comfortable with acknowledging an autobiographical dimension to the study. My past and current "academic" experiences as: a theology student at a conservative evangelical seminary; a pastor, evangelist, missionary, and theology teacher; a student in Columbus public schools and at The Ohio State University; a teacher at the high school and university levels; and as a novice philosopher, have provided me with relevant and informative insights which I will apply
in my examination of Bennett’s views. Such an autobiographical dimension is also present in much of Bennett’s work. He is fond of personal anecdotes and autobiographical allusions. Of course, one must be cautious not to offer unwarranted or unjustified inferences and generalizations from these anecdotes, and I will make every effort to identify the personal and political interests that are at stake when I make particular claims.

One reason for including an autobiographical dimension in this study involves my concern for clarity and simplicity, as well as my desire to be understood. Bennett’s work also exhibits such concerns. He seeks to address his concerns in a non-technical way in order that his work might be accessible to a wide public audience. I see nothing wrong with appealing to a broad audience, and I would like to do so with my work as well. However, one must always be sensitive to the danger of compromising one’s accuracy and appealing to one’s audience in a demagogic manner.

I would also like to acknowledge that on matters of politics, religion, and pedagogy, my beliefs have changed considerably over the past several years. I guess on most matters I could be fairly characterized as having “moved to the left.” Interestingly, we see a similar shift in Bennett’s political and ideological commitments during his formative years. However, in Bennett’s case the shift is to the right (though he maintains that his views have stayed basically the same, while it is the bulk of academics in the humanities who have moved to the left). Some people have been alarmed by my shifting beliefs. I have been accused of being an apostate who has abandoned religious belief in order that I might fulfill my wanton sinful desires with impunity. Others have claimed that my shifting beliefs are the inevitable result of my immersion in that bastion of secular humanism known as The Ohio State University.

Rather than being alarmed at changes in one’s beliefs, I would suggest that such changes be viewed as evidence of the possibilities of rigorous philosophical reflection, intellectual experimentation, and critical dialogue. That change and growth are possible should be an encouragement, because it indicates that critical dialogue need not be an unproductive “talking at each other.” At the same time, this reminds us of another tension the philosopher and critic must grapple with. Namely, the tension between the commitment to principles and the willingness to modify and in some cases abandon the principles to which we are committed.
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature on Bennett and by Bennett is both abundant and yet at the same time not as great as the sheer number of sources might indicate. By this I mean that while there is no shortage of literature by Bennett, there is also much overlap and repetition of content in the literature. Bennett seems to have several themes which he hammers away at, time and again, in various formats and for various occasions, but with little variation in content or line of argumentation. For example, Bennett's treatment of religion in schooling and society appears in his book, Our Children and Our Country, as a chapter titled "Religious Belief and the Constitutional Order."43 Bennett originally delivered the essay as Secretary of Education, in the form of a speech, at the University of Missouri, on September 17, 1986. The essay appeared in a condensed form in Reader's Digest, under the title, "The Case for Religion in Schools."44 The gist of the essay appeared again, in a version amplified with illustrative personal anecdotes from Bennett's political career, as a chapter in The Devaluing of America. The chapter is entitled "The Great Cultural Divide: Religion in American Political Life."45 Bennett has gotten a lot of mileage from a relatively standard set of claims and arguments. This pattern applies to Bennett's treatment of such issues as moral education, the preeminence of Western classics in the curriculum, the war against drugs, the moral and cultural decline of contemporary society, and so on. During his tenure as a public official, Bennett was the subject of extensive press coverage. Because Bennett emphasized this standard set of themes, much of the coverage and criticism of Bennett overlaps and becomes repetitive. For the review of the literature, I will employ the following format. I will first treat Bennett's books, then his major articles, essays, and government reports. The literature of Bennett's critics will be listed in the Bibliography.

Books

Bennett's book, The De-Valuing of America: The Fight for Our Culture and Our Children (1992), is the most complete and thorough expression of his thought on matters of public policy. In the strictest sense of the term, this is the only "book" which Bennett has authored. His other "books" include a collection of speeches he gave while Secretary of Education,46 a collection of sociological statistics with commentary,47 and
at least two books of collections of classic literary pieces which Bennett offers as
illustrative examples of virtue and morality. He also coauthored a book with Terry
Eastland. Counting by Race: Equality from the Founding Fathers to Bakke and
Weber. 49

The 250 page Devaluing of America was published in 1992. The book might best
be described as a combination political memoir and social critique. Bennett does not
provide us with a sensationalistic “kiss-and-tell” account of his stint in government.
Rather, he comes off as a staunch supporter of both Ronald Reagan and George Bush.
Bennett makes no effort to conceal his great admiration for Reagan, and in this book
Bennett offers an almost hagiographic account of the former President.

Bennett claims that taking a stand in the public arena on matters of public
policy is a primary objective of the book, as it was in his political career. He writes, “My
real hope is to do with this book what I tried to do during my public career: stimulate a
true national discussion over some of the most consequential issues of our time.”
According to Bennett, the most consequential issues of our time are issues which
concern cultural and moral values. He thus introduces The Devaluing of America in
this manner: “We are in the midst of a struggle over whose values will prevail in
America. This book is about that struggle.” 50

Bennett frames this struggle over values in terms of it being a political and
cultural conflict between liberal elites and the majority of Americans. Bennett contends
that our nation’s public culture and institutions, by and large, reflect the values of a
liberal elite who are out of touch with the values and moral sentiments of mainstream
America. Bennett maintains that he is simply voicing the demands of average
Americans for our social institutions to be accountable to, and representative of,
traditional values and common sense. Concerning this struggle over societal values,
Bennett writes: “The critical cultural questions we need to ask are: Are our social and
cultural institutions worthy of the American people? Do they promote the qualities and
habits and values we would wish? If they do not, we need to see to it that they are
reformed.”

Bennett devotes the bulk of his book to citing those social institutions which he
argues have strayed from the traditional mores of most Americans. He calls for their
reform. The book’s chapters are organized around the key issues debated during his
tenure as director of The National Endowment for the Humanities, Secretary of Education, and director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. Thus, we have chapters on the government funding of controversial art, "The Culture Wars"; the problems of America's public schools and how to solve them, "Crisis in American Education" and "What Works in American Education, and Why"; the war on drugs, "The American Nightmare" and "Fighting Back"; the debates over curriculum, multiculturalism, and affirmative action in Higher Education, "The Great University Debates" and "Race and the New Politics of Resentment." Bennett then offers a chapter in which he argues for a greater role for religion and religious values in the public sphere, "The Great Cultural Divide: Religion in American Political Life." Bennett closes the book with some ruminations on the role and functions of the political process in contemporary America.

The book is not a scholarly work, nor is it a work of philosophy, nor is it a set of detailed policy arguments. In fact, Bennett acknowledges from the start that much of the book should be viewed in this light. He writes in the Preface:

I describe what I believe to be the troubling condition of our children and our culture, the connection between the two, and explain why and how they came to be that way. I set out my views on how these things have come to such a pass, what I've tried to do about them, and where we need to go from here. This is what I have tried to achieve. At the same time, it is important to say what this book is not. It is not a collection of tracts that outline neat public policy prescriptions for our social woes. It is not a definitive work on American culture. Others have written, and written well, on these subjects. Rather, this is a chronicle of my story and what I believe it reveals about pressing domestic and social issues, the modern-day political establishment, and the battle for our culture and our children.51

The book Our Children & Our Country: Improving America's Schools & Affirming The Common Culture, consists of twenty-four speeches which Bennett delivered while serving as Secretary of Education. The 235 page book was published in 1988. Bennett's prescriptions for America's schools might be characterized as a call for a return to the basics (standardized content and emphasis on moral education and character development) for primary and secondary schools, and a return to the traditional values epitomized in the great Western classics in Higher Education. Bennett argues that, for the most part, America's schools have failed in achieving this mission. He writes:

In the 1960s and 1970s, we neglected and denied much of the best
in American education. We simply stopped doing the right things. We allowed an assault on intellectual and moral standards. Traditional education practices were discarded, expectations were lowered, and the curriculum was "dumbed-down." The "values clarification" movement, which asserted that education should not impart ethical standards and moral principles, gained currency. Bennett locates the source of these problems in the "misguided policies" of educators in the 1960s and 1970s. He argues that these policies and practices have had tragic consequences for both student performance in schools, and for society at large. "The effects were damaging to our educational well-being. We saw an alarming drop in standardized test scores, and American students suffered in virtually all international comparisons. As educators chose to remain neutral on moral matters and to shun the development of character, we saw an increase in various pathologies among young people." Bennett often condemns this state of affairs by blaming educators, administrators, and teachers' unions for being fiscally irresponsible and for being poor stewards of the tax-payer's money. "Our children were too often the victims of adults' indulgences in educational and social foolishness. During the 1960s and 1970s, Americans nearly doubled spending in real terms on education--and we experienced the worst education decline in our history."

The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories (1993), is Bennett's most popular book, being a #1 national bestseller. The book is a compendium of stories, poems, and essays, which Bennett has edited and commented on. The book's contents are organized around ten virtues: self-discipline, compassion, responsibility, friendship, work, courage, perseverance, honesty, loyalty, and faith. Bennett offers a general introduction to the book, as well as introducing each virtue, and offering brief comments on some of the particular pieces in the collection.

Bennett states that the intent of the book is "to aid in the time-honored task of the moral education of the young." In an attempt to fulfill this educational imperative, Bennett takes his cue from Aristotle. "Aristotle wrote that good habits formed at youth make all the difference. And moral education must affirm the central importance of moral example." Bennett contends that the moral example set by adults, teachers, and parents is of great importance. He maintains that the moral model of virtuous adults can be augmented by cultivating youngsters in moral literacy. Toward this end, the book is a "how to" book for moral literacy. Bennett writes:

Along with precept, habit, and example, there is also the need for
what we might call moral literacy. The stories, poems, essays, and
other writing presented here are intended to help children achieve
this moral literacy. The purpose of this book is to show parents,
teachers, students, and children what the virtues look like, what
they are in practice, how to recognize them, and how they work.53

In 1994, Bennett released a 138 page book entitled The Index of Leading Cultural
Indicators: Facts and Figures on the State of American Society. Bennett’s Index is
loosely patterned after the U.S. Bureau of the Census’ publication of key economic
indicators. The Economic Index is intended to interpret business developments and
economic trends. According to Bennett, “The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators
attempts to bring a similar kind of empirical analysis to cultural issues. It is an
assessment of the moral, social, and behavioral condition of modern American society.”
Bennett does not engage in any original statistical or demographic research, but relies
on existing studies by government agencies and polling organizations. The data is
presented in the form of charts and graphs, which Bennett calls “an extensive factual
analysis of our current cultural condition.” The charts and graphs are accompanied by
brief commentaries, which Bennett contends function to “provide perspective on, and
interpretation of, the raw data.” It should be noted, though, that the commentaries are
seldom occasioned by the cited statistics, and none comment directly on the data as it is
organized and presented by Bennett. It often seems Bennett simply chooses select
quotations which express the spin he wants to give the particular statistical graph. For
example, a chart on church membership is accompanied by quotations from George
Washington, Charles Colson, and Margaret Thatcher.54

Bennett’s Index is organized in five chapters: “Crime,” “Family and Children,”
“Youth: Pathologies and Behavior,” “Education,” and “Popular Culture and Religion.”
The book concludes with an Appendix: “Social Spending and Economic Growth.” In
this appendix, Bennett brings home a point which pervades much of the study. Namely,
that despite three decades of growth in government spending on education and social
programs, we are experiencing increased social pathologies such as violent crimes,
juvenile delinquency, drug use, illegitimate births, abortions, and gratuitous sex and
violence in popular culture. He also cites statistics which he claims demonstrate a
steady decline in educational performance and achievement. Bennett comments on this
situation in dire terms:

Over the past three decades we have experienced substantial social
regression. Today the forces of social decomposition are challenging—and in some instances, overtaking—the forces of social composition. And when decomposition takes hold, it exacts an enormous human cost. Unless these exploding social pathologies are reversed, they will lead to the decline and perhaps even to the fall of the American republic.55

In response to this state of affairs, Bennett notes that political and governmental solutions have their limits, but that much can be done. First, he suggests a reassessment of government programs which he contends have created unintended harmful consequences for the very people the programs were intended to assist (e.g. welfare). Second, he claims that “political leaders can help shape social attitudes through public discourse and through social legislation.” He cites the civil rights legislation of the 1950s and 60s as “recent examples of how laws can give voice to our moral beliefs.” Third, he suggests a “reform-minded and thoughtful legislative social agenda” which would include a tough-minded criminal justice system, tax relief for families, a reversal of the “destructive incentives” of the welfare system, and “a radical reform of education through national standards, merit pay, alternative certification, a core curriculum, and allowing parents to choose the public, private, or religious schools to which they send their children.”

As with most of his works, Bennett locates the source of our society’s problems in the moral and cultural sphere. And as with much of his work, Bennett assigns to education the central role in solving these problems. He introduces the Index as follows:

The social regression of the last 30 years is due in large part to the enfeebled state of our social institutions and their failure to carry out a critical and time-honored task: the moral education of the young. We desperately need to recover a sense of the fundamental purpose of education, which is to engage in the architecture of souls. When a self-governing society ignores this responsibility, then, as this book demonstrates, it does so at its peril.56

**Essays, Articles, and Reports**

While director of the National Humanities Center, Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, and later as director of the National Endowment for The Humanities, Bennett published three major articles on the state of humanities, and their role in public policy and education: “The Humanities, the Universities, and Public Policy” (1981), “The Shattered Humanities” (1982), and “To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on The Humanities in
Higher Education" (1984). Bennett begins the first article by stating what he takes to be the essential role of the humanities in shaping and informing the mind of future policy makers. "The most important contribution the study of the humanities makes to public policy is the sound education of the young men and women who will make public policy in the future. Through the development of the minds and sensibilities of the young, the humanities can critically influence public life." He goes on to add that an education in the humanities can equip students with the ability to distinguish "what is first-rate and what is not." He writes, "The purpose of a liberal arts education is to teach students to know when a person is talking rot. Because of the amount of rot around these days, educating students to know it when they see it is no small achievement." Bennett notes that while public policy often takes a narrow technical or instrumental approach to social issues, the humanities--at their best--address the more profound questions of "the spiritual circumstances of our civilization," ideas about human nature, the ideals and beliefs on which our society is founded, and questions about our individual and collective goals and aspirations. Thus, Bennett characterizes the humanities as "the study of the best of all thinking and knowledge."

After this initial sketch of the purpose of the humanities and their relation to public policy, Bennett makes several criticisms of colleges and universities for failing to deliver on this time-honored task of the humanities. For example, he argues that while the vital humanistic needs and concerns of each generation remain the same, scholars and philosophers have often abandoned these concerns:

Kant raises philosophical questions: What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope? Plato asks: What is a just state? A just man? Is pleasure the good life? Aristotle says a person must study ethics in order to become good. But much philosophy today studies not these questions but the study of the study of these questions, so far removed from the original issues that the ancient connection is indiscernible. Today many philosophers are interested only in the residue of the residue of these vital questions.57

Bennett also lays blame on university policies which he contends promote a proliferation of arcane, unfathomable jargon in scholarly journals at the expense of the "general practitioner" of the humanities who would write for popular audiences, and concentrate on teaching undergraduates. In conclusion, Bennett argues that this state of affairs constitutes the abandonment of "our task of providing continuity, of educating each generation about the intellectual, spiritual, moral, and political
birthright to which it is heir and from which, in the end, public policy must flow."

As the title, "The Shattered Humanities," boldly declares, Bennett views the current state of the humanities as being dismal. According to Bennett, this sorry state of affairs is a result of the abandoning of traditional goals and purposes in the humanities. Bennett contends that once upon a time the humanities consciously and unashamedly pursued "intellectual refinement and spiritual elevation." The humanities stressed contemplation of the great issues of life, as read through the careful study of classic texts--the traditionally agreed upon "great works"--which have stood the test of time, and were at the center of the curriculum. The curriculum of the past was "strengthened by coherence and it was sustained by consensus."

Bennett cites the usual suspects in his indictment of the humanities. The rise of moral and intellectual relativism in education, a loss of faith in the tradition of the humanities among educators, and a curriculum which lacks coherence and substance, in which educators offer a "smorgasbord" of faddish courses and act as "multicultural travel agents." Thus, Bennett describes the problem: "Humanities education is no longer an introduction to, and immersion in, the best thought and known. It is, instead, a collection of disconnected and often eccentric areas of inquiry." Among the causes of this fragmentation is what Bennett refers to as "a perverse embarrassment one sees in many places about the achievements of our civilization. As corollary, there is embarrassment about the intellectual, moral, and spiritual taproots out of which it grew. There is, consequently, a loss of faith in the tradition of the humanities, a tradition through which our civilization both kept stock of itself and came to know what was worth defending."59

In order to defend the traditional goals and purposes of the humanities, Bennett calls on educators to resist the tyranny of fashion and to take a stand "on matters of enduring importance, matters that always have been the concern of the humanities: courage, fidelity, friendship, honor, love, justice, goodness, ambiguity, time, power, faith." Bennett contends that despite the views of relativists, these matters are worthy of pursuit and defense. Maintaining the essential core and rationale of the humanities is what students need, and what society demands. Bennett concludes: "Great works, important bodies of knowledge, and powerful methods of inquiry constitute the core of the humanities and sustain the intellectual, moral, and political traditions of our
civilization. And I think that it is to them that we turn when we decide that the purpose of learning is indeed to save the soul and enlarge the mind."

Bennett's trio of reports on the state of the humanities reaches its peak with the oft commented upon study, "To Reclaim a Legacy."60 This piece might well be regarded as Bennett's legacy of his tenure as Director of the NEH. In March 1984, Bennett invited "thirty-one prominent teachers, scholars, administrators, and authorities on higher education to join a Study Group on the State of Learning in the Humanities in Higher Education." The group met for a series of three public meetings to seek and discuss answers to three questions: What is the condition of learning in the humanities?; why is it as it is?: And what, if anything, should be done about it? Though the report was birthed in the matrix of this study group, Bennett assumes full responsibility for the study's authorship. "Members of the group were shown a draft of the report and asked to comment on it. From their responses, it is clear that they concur with the report's general thrust and with its particular points." The report has all the markings of a Bennett document. The contents vary little from his two previous pieces on the humanities, though "A Legacy" is a bit more detailed, with a more thorough treatment of suggestions for improving the state of teaching in the humanities.

Many of the criticisms Bennett levels at education in the humanities involve his lamenting of the lack of emphasis on Western civilization in school curriculums. "The humanities, and particularly the study of Western civilization, have lost their central place in the undergraduate curriculum." As a result, "too many students are graduating from American colleges and universities lacking even the most rudimentary knowledge about the history, literature, art, and philosophical foundations of their nation and their civilization." Bennett again cites gutless educators of the 1960s and 70s as being the cause of this problem. "A collective loss of nerve and faith on the part of both faculty and academic administrators during the late 1960s and early 1970s was undeniably destructive of the curriculum. When students demanded a greater role in setting their own educational agendas, we eagerly responded by abandoning course requirements of any kind and with them the intellectual authority to say to students what the outcome of a college education ought to be." According to Bennett, this "collective loss of nerve" resulted in a relativistic morass in which educators have become bogged down. "With intellectual authority relinquished, we found that we did not need
to worry about what was worth knowing, worth defending, worth believing. The curriculum was no longer a statement about what knowledge mattered; instead, it became the product of a political compromise among competing schools and departments overlaid by marketing considerations.”

Among the suggestions Bennett makes for improving the state of humanities education are as follows: “College and university presidents must take responsibility for the educational needs of all students in their institutions by making plain what the institution stands for and what knowledge it regards as essential to a good education”; “Colleges and universities must reward excellent teaching in hiring, promotion, and tenure decisions”; “Faculties must put aside narrow departmentalism and instead work with administrators to shape a challenging curriculum with a core of common studies”; “Study of the humanities and Western civilization must take its place at the heart of the college curriculum.”

The article, “Moral Education and Indoctrination” (1982), is perhaps Bennett’s most scholarly piece. It is certainly his most philosophical treatment of an educational issue. However, Bennett is not the sole author of the essay. The primary author of the piece is George Sher, of the University of Vermont. The article does not resemble anything else Bennett has written. Though the article’s plea for directive moral education is found in much of Bennett’s writing, the plea is here augmented with an attempt to offer sustained philosophical argumentation for the practice of directive moral education. This helps a little to alleviate the paucity of such philosophical rigor in Bennett’s other works.

The article begins with the following claim: “It is now widely agreed that educators have no business inculcating moral views in the classroom. According to many philosophers and educational theorists, all attempts to influence students’ moral behavior through exhortation and personal example are indoctrinative and should give way to more discursive efforts to guide children in developing their own values.” The authors argue against the charge that directive moral education is necessarily indoctrinative, and they also argue that “adequate moral education must include both directive and discursive elements.” The authors first offer a brief account of the content, methods, and reasons for directive moral education, then they proceed to respond to two objections which are closely related to the charge that such directive moral instruction
is indoctrinative. Namely, they argue against the charge that direct moral education violates a student's autonomy, and second, they argue against the charge that such instruction involves sectarian teaching inappropriate to a pluralistic society.

In response to the autonomy charge, the authors appeal to what some have called “the paradox of moral education.” What this paradox involves is the seemingly contradictory nature of the claim that in order to cultivate and equip students to be autonomous adults we must first engage in directive instruction which may at the time of implementation constitute a violation of the student’s autonomy. In other words, by inculcating moral principles in the minds of students, and by directly cultivating an appreciation and understanding of the force of moral reasons, teachers are thus contributing to the student’s future moral autonomy. The authors then address the second objection to directive moral education. That being the charge that such instruction violates the social ideals of tolerance and pluralism. The authors note that if a society values pluralism and toleration then it follows that the society would value the acceptance of the principles that support and further tolerance and pluralism. Hence, the authors conclude, "if there is an effective method of advancing such principles which is not otherwise objectionable, we must acknowledge a strong case for adopting it." They argue that directive moral education is such a method, and that "some forms of it seem justified by our commitment to toleration itself."

The authors close the article with some comments on several forms of directive moral education which they contend are not subject to charges of being sectarian, coercive, or objectionable. They list several conditions which directive instruction must meet to avoid these objections. "To warrant directive teaching, a moral principle must first be clearly and firmly grounded. In addition, it should be simple enough to be comprehended at an early developmental stage, general enough to apply in a variety of situations, and central rather than peripheral to our moral corpus. To be acceptable as a method of directive teaching, a practice must neither impair a child’s later ability to respond to moral reasons nor violate his rights." The authors claim that in most cases the satisfaction of these conditions is undisputed. "However, if an otherwise eligible principle or method is unacceptable to a conscientious minority, then respect for that minority may itself dictate restraint in directive teaching."

The authors mention some moral principles to which alternatives have been offered. For example, moral principles concerning the legitimacy of competition or the
desirability of marriage have often been contested. The authors argue that while such contested moral issues give educators cause for careful examination, "directive teaching of principles favoring existing institutions cannot be ruled out."

Upon his confirmation as Secretary of Education, Bennett joined other members of President Reagan's Cabinet, in offering brief reports on how each perceived the role and function of his Cabinet post. Bennett's piece was titled "The Role of the Federal Government in Education."62 In the report, Bennett offers his often repeated contention that schools work best when under local control. However, he does maintain that the Department of Education has a responsibility to protect the civil rights of all students, and to insure that all students have the opportunity for a good education. Bennett also notes that the Department of Education functions as a clearinghouse for education in the various states. Bennett claims that one of the key duties of the Secretary of Education is to use the post as a "bully pulpit." Bennett writes, "I have the responsibility of making the best case I can for the best ideas we have about education and of doing so publicly. I have the job of stimulating the national discussion on education among the American people."

While Secretary of Education, Bennett authored four major reports: "First Lessons," a report on the condition of elementary education; "American Education: Making it Work," which is a report to the American people on the state of our nation's schools; and two curricular plans, "James Madison High School" and "James Madison Elementary School." Like the report "To Reclaim a Legacy," the report "First Lessons" (1986)63 grew out of a study group organized by Bennett. The Elementary Education Study Group comprised 21 "distinguished Americans," who held public meetings and exchanged papers and correspondence. The Group's efforts "were also informed by extensive staff research, by studies undertaken by public and private organizations around the country, and by correspondence from interested individuals and groups." Bennett claims that while the "excellence movement" of recent years has focused on secondary and college education. "First Lessons" is the first major national report on elementary education in the United States since 1953.

Bennett states that the report was not motivated because elementary education is in deep trouble--he contends it isn't--but because of its great importance. Elementary education is not only important because of the vast number of students, teachers and
administrators involved in the enterprise, but also because of the great influence elementary education has in shaping the lives of students. Bennett writes, "After the family, elementary school is the most influential institution in young children's lives: helping to shape their first and lasting views of themselves, molding aspirations and skills, introducing them to their country, to their culture, to the universe itself.

According to Bennett, the study attempts to address elementary education as a whole. "It concerns itself not with geographic or economic differences that set one kind of school apart from others, but with the characteristics, habits, curricula, and spirit that typify the best schools everywhere." Bennett claims the report is not a statement of federal policy, but he encourages educators and local government officials to give consideration to the implementation of the study's recommendations.

Among the recommendations made by the report is a call for greater parental involvement in the education of elementary students. Bennett contends that schools need to be accountable to the demands and expectations of parents, and that parents assume a share in the task of educating their children. Bennett also recommends that "we acknowledge parents' right to choose their children's schools as the norm, not the exception, and that we develop ways to extend that right to as many parents as possible." The report also offers suggestions for the elementary curriculum. Bennett argues that reading is of prime importance. He claims that we "already know what works" in developing literacy, and that reading programs in elementary schools should incorporate these tried and true methods to develop students' reading proficiency. He also comments that social studies courses need to develop a more coherent core curriculum. He states that too often, "today's children pick up bits of lessons from an odd, amorphous social science grab bag called 'social studies'."

Bennett also offers suggestions concerning elementary school professionals. First, he argues for the "deregulation of principalship." This would involve allowing qualified administrators from business and government to assume positions as elementary school principals. He also argues for the reform of the principles of teacher compensation. "The essential point is to start paying teachers on the basis of quality rather than seniority, performance rather than tenure, merit rather than uniformity." In addition, Bennett advocates higher standards for teacher assessment, as well as providing greater opportunity and classroom freedom to those teachers who demonstrate
the ability to impart knowledge and skills to students.

Secretary of Education, Bennett's "American Education: Making it Work," is a lengthy report on the state of American education. The report was issued five years after the National Commission on Excellence in Education published its report on schools, "A Nation At Risk (1983)." The NCEE's report included the now famous assessment: "The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future." According to Bennett, that report "gave eloquent voice to the growing public sense of crisis about our children and their schools." Bennett notes that Americans have historically placed great faith in schooling. In recent decades, however, Bennett claims that "our schools have too often failed to accomplish what Americans rightly expect of them. Though our allegiance to quality education remains firm, our confidence in the ability of our schools to realize that ideal has been battered by signs of decline: falling test scores, weakened curricula, classroom disorder, and student drug use."

In the report, Bennett contends that in many ways America's schools have shown some improvement in the five years since "A Nation At Risk" was issued. However, he maintains that many pressing problems still plague our nation's schools, and that we are in need of educational reform. Bennett's report was based on personal observations and analysis of "the best available recent education research and draws upon a good deal of as yet unpublished research conducted or commissioned by the Department of Education." Thus, the first part of the report lays out Bennett's summary and interpretation of the research about the condition of America's schools. Matters discussed in this section of the report include school attendance, graduation rates, assessment and test scores, student discipline, textbooks, and the curriculum.

The second section of the report is concerned with Bennett's prescriptions for America's schools. He argues that there are five fundamental avenues of reform which need to be pursued: "Strengthening content, ensuring equal intellectual opportunity, establishing an ethos of achievement, recruiting and rewarding good teachers and principals, and instituting accountability throughout our education system." In discussing how these reforms might be achieved, Bennett relies on three familiar themes. First, is his contention that reform is the responsibility of local officials, educators and parents. He writes, "the greatest authority to effect real and lasting change belongs to
the state governments, where primary constitutional responsibility for our schools has always rested." Second, Bennett argues that increasing spending for schools is not the answer for educational reform. Bennett responds to those who call for more money to fix our schools' problems: "Today we tend to hear what might be called opposition by extortion, the false claim that to fix our schools will first require a fortune in new funding." Third, Bennett rails against those who he claims are placing political interest over educational reform. "Almost without fail, wherever a worthwhile school proposal or legislative initiative is under consideration, those with a vested interest in the educational status quo will use political muscle to block reform. And too often the anti-reformers succeed." Bennett argues that if schools are to improve, the power of entrenched political interests must be overcome. The National Education Association has been the object of vehement criticism from Bennett in this regard. In the report Bennett calls the NEA "the single greatest threat to education reform."

Bennett's two final reports as Secretary of Education are "James Madison High School," and "James Madison Elementary School." Bennett calls these reports "books", though each contains only 60 pages. "JM High School" (1987) was published first, and was soon followed by "JM Elementary" (1988). Both reports involve Bennett's idealized depiction of a sound core curriculum. Bennett sets out the course sequences, methods, and contents for each school. He also illustrates the curriculum plans with examples of schools which are currently implementing programs--similar to those suggested in the reports--with great success. During his tenure as Secretary of Education, Bennett had visited many of these schools. Their mention in these and other works by Bennett is consistent with the Department of Education's National Recognition Program, and his efforts to publicize "what works in American education."

Bennett begins "JM High School," with the customary modicum of introductory praise for American secondary education. "No other country's system of education serves so many students for so many years and for such diverse ends. Even by the standards of most other industrialized nations, American education is more comprehensive, more prolonged, and more democratic." But then he offers his standard warning that all is not well. "But, too often, it is also less rigorous and less productive. It need not be." He again notes the study "A Nation At Risk," and concurs with its position that in many secondary schools "we have a cafeteria-style curriculum in which
the appetizers and desserts can easily be mistaken for the main courses.” He therefore proposes the James Madison plan as a model from which to address this problem.

Bennett does make it clear that “JM High School” is not a formal federal policy mandate, but rather, it is Bennett’s considered judgment on a matter of great public importance. With the report, Bennett intends to offer “a useful contribution to the national conversation about education reform, suggesting directions for new attention and effort.” He also stresses that the report, “while reflecting the quality and character of a number of real-world models, is meant as a goal and an ideal, not as a monolithic program to be uniformly imposed or slavishly followed.” As he often does, Bennett contends that the responsibility for assessing and implementing his suggestions lies at the local level.

“JM Elementary” follows the format of “JM High School,” and it also relies heavily on Bennett’s earlier report, “First Lessons.” The pivotal issue Bennett addresses in his introductory section of “JM Elementary,” is the so-called “content versus method debate.” Bennett laments what he takes to be the unjustified assault by teachers and educational theorists on a “content based” curriculum in elementary schools. “Received educational wisdom often stands opposed to common sense; today, unfortunately, much of it also stands opposed to content. In the professional schools that train our teachers and develop our curricula, it is still possible--more than a decade after the nation’s disastrous education experiments of the 1960s and 1970s--to see content-rich elementary study derided as ‘rote’ learning, to be told that children may be taught ‘higher-order thinking skills’ without reference to specific knowledge, or to hear that the ‘mere fact’ of traditional school subjects are unimportant to early instruction in more relevant general ‘understandings’.” Bennett claims that he is not advocating that educators ignore the matters of pedagogical technique and classroom methods, nor that the emphasis on content can only be done at the expense of method and the consideration of students’ needs and interests. Rather, Bennett is of the opinion that educational and psychological research has already demonstrated what methods work in education. Educators need only avail themselves to these time tested methods. And, Bennett argues, a degree of mastery of a basic core content is the necessary antecedent for advanced cognitive and academic development by students.

In addition to these major works just reviewed, Bennett authored and published numerous articles and speeches. Some of these are included in his book Our Country.
Our Children, and most are simply a recycling of the content of his major reports, modified for specific occasions and audiences. Therefore I will simply review these works in a brief summary fashion.

"Ten Questions for State, Local Educators to Consider In Quest of Quality Schools" (1986), 68 is addressed to local educational, business, and civic leaders. Bennett poses 10 "thought-provoking" questions for these leaders to consider as they pursue excellence and educational reform.

"Readiness for Work, Readiness for Life" (1985) 69 is an article which was developed from a speech Bennett gave to the Colorado Association of Commerce and Industry in May, 1985. In the article, Bennett argues for education that stresses the "three C's": content (at the core of the curriculum), character (inculcating virtue in the young), and choice (giving parents greater choice concerning their children's education). He argues that such an education is desirable for students pursuing technical careers as well as those students who take a college-track course of study. "In addition to training students in specific fields, we must concern ourselves with inculcating virtue as well. As the liberal arts play an important part in the formation of character, students can learn from them to commit themselves to a certain task and ultimately to their professions."

A collection of five essays by Bennett is included in the Winter 1987 issue of Education (Chula Vista, California). The essays are: "Accountability in Our Schools," "Children and Drugs," "Aids and the Education of Our Children," "What Works in Education? The Scientific Approach," and "Truth in Sex: Why Johnny Can't Abstain." 70 The titles of the essays reflect the standard concerns of Secretary Bennett, and the pieces contain his standard arguments on the issues, as well as including the addresses of government services and resources for educators to contact. Bennett also published several additional articles on issues relating to the moral education of our nation's youth. In "The Role of the Family in the Nurture and Protection of the Young" (1987), 71 Bennett cites the numerous social pathologies which are plaguing young people. He claims that this state of affairs reflects the failed social policies of the federal government over the last two decades. Bennett argues that "the family is better able to make decisions regarding the well-being of its young members than is the federal government and that federal policy, therefore, should be concerned primarily in strengthening rather
than supplanting the family’s influence and authority.” In “Sex and the Education of our Children” (1988),72 Bennett argues that the chief flaw of most sex education programs is their failure to adequately incorporate instruction in virtue and morality. He claims that to “neglect questions of character in a sex-education class would be a great and unforgivable error.” He argues that “if sex-education courses do not help in the effort to provide an education in character, then let them be gone from the presence of our children.”

In 1988, Bennett published an article titled “Moral Literacy and The Formation of Character” (1988).73 In this piece he makes his case for the use of illustrative literary examples in moral education. This approach to moral education was later fleshed out in The Book of Virtues, which might be viewed as a textbook for moral literacy. In the article “Young James Madison: His Character and Civic Values” (1987),74 Bennett offers a biographical account of James Madison, which he hopes will serve as a model for educators to follow: to show how they can effectively incorporate historical examples in their quest to cultivate virtue and moral literacy in students.

One of Bennett’s more substantive pieces on pedagogy is the essay “History—Key to Political Responsibility.”75 The essay was first given as an address at an Ethics and Public Policy conference in April 1985, and was later published in the Summer 1985 issue of Policy Review. Bennett argues that educators need to teach history in such a way that it restores students’ declining faith in the principles of liberal democracy. He argues that a justified faith in our country’s political principles is dependent on the examination and transmission of these principles in the classroom. He writes, “I believe that if our children do not even know the inherited principles of a liberal democracy, it is foolish to expect that they should put their faith in those principles.” Bennett sees the transmission of social and political values as the primordial task of any school system. He sees the history class as the ideal forum in which to transmit a cultural heritage which functions to “legitimize the political system.”

Bennett contends that the decline in students’ understanding of and faith in our nation’s political heritage is due to the pervasive relativism which has inundated the teaching of history. “Surely one explanation for the fact that democratic values no longer seem to command the assent they once did is that for many years now the
teaching of social studies in our schools has been dominated by cultural relativism, the notion that the attempt to draw meaningful distinctions between opposing traditions is a judgment that all virtuous and right-minded people must sternly condemn." Bennett argues that this ill-conceived relativism can be remedied by the "honest and truthful" study of history. He offers numerous suggestions for how social studies educators can achieve this goal, and in so doing, help to legitimize our political heritage. "If taught honestly and truthfully, the study of history will give our students a grasp of their nation, a nation that the study of history and current events will reveal is still, indeed, 'the last best hope on earth'."

In 1983, a study of education in Japan was initiated by President Reagan and Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone. The final report was published in January 1987, by the U.S. Department of Education. The epilogue to the report was written by William J. Bennett, and published as the article "Looking at Japanese Education: Implications for American Education" (1987). Bennett summarizes the lessons Americans might draw from the study. Bennett contends that American educators can glean many practical lessons from the practice of education in Japan. Bennett is of the opinion that Japanese education works. By this he means that Japanese schooling "has been demonstrably successful in providing modern Japan with a powerfully competitive economy, a broadly literate population, a stable democratic government, a civilization in which there is relatively little crime or violence, and a functional society wherein the basic technological infrastructure is sound and reliable." Though all these benefits are not totally attributable to the educational system, Bennett claims that Japanese schooling does play an essential role in reinforcing this state of affairs. In the article, Bennett offers brief comments on twelve principles at work in Japanese education. Twelve principles, which he suggests American educators might be wise to consider. Though these principles are evident in the Japanese educational system, Bennett argues that these are the same principles which do work when implemented in American education. These suggested principles include more parental involvement, setting high standards and expectations, emphasizing the cultivation of character and virtue, and the generational transmission of traditional culture.

Interviews

Published interviews of Bennett offer an additional source for his views on
schooling and society. Several of these interviews provide a substantial distillation of his thought on the pressing issues to which he tended in each of his government positions and in his recent social commentary. In a 1984 issue of Academe, Bennett was interviewed by Academe faculty editor Donald Rackin. At the time of the interview, Bennett was director of the NEH. Titled "A Conversation with William Bennett," the Academe piece provides us with Bennett’s reflections on his academic career as well as his account of the philosophy and workings of the NEH under his direction. He also addresses such matters as the politics of issuing NEH grants, and the constitutional and fiscal responsibilities which Bennett assumed in directing the agency.

In 1985 an interview titled “Transmitting values through education: A conversation with William J. Bennett,” was published in Momentum, the journal of the National Catholic Education Association. Bennett argues again for the teaching of values in public and private schools. He contends that teachers can endorse specific moral principles in public schools, without subscribing to particular sectarian beliefs. He suggests that teachers appeal to “the values we share as a people,” which constitutes a “consensus of morality in our nation.” In the interview Bennett also makes his case for school choice, tuition tax credits, and vouchers. He argues that vouchers need not be construed as an attack on public education, but rather as a means to empower parents with greater control over their children’s education.

"Curricular Reforms and College Costs: an Interview with Secretary Bennett," was published in September 1988, in The Chronicle of Higher Education. The interview was conducted in the closing days of his tenure as Secretary of Education, and in the interview he addresses issues concerning higher education. The interviewer notes the similarities between Bennett’s criticisms of higher education and the criticisms offered by Allan Bloom in the best seller, The Closing of the American Mind. Bennett agrees, and he makes his familiar contention that university administrators and faculties are out of touch with the cultural and political sentiments of mainstream America. “To put it very simply, the elite universities’ faculties in the humanities and social sciences are far, far, far to the left of the views of most Americans. And that creates a skew of perspective which then has implications.” Bennett states that for the most part, colleges and universities have not been responsive to his criticisms. He maintains that they have
made little progress in holding down tuition, achieving a political and intellectual balance in the hiring of faculty, or in fighting drug abuse on campuses. The interviewer cites the common perception that the Reagan Administration was "hostile to, or at the very least, uninterested in plans to encourage more minority students to attend college." Bennett takes issue with this perception, however, and he argues that the answer to this problem lies not with such liberal programs as affirmative action, but rather with securing a solid elementary and secondary education for minorities, thus adequately preparing them for the rigors of college.

"Virtue Man," is an interview conducted by Michael Cromartie, and published in Christianity Today (1993). The interview comes on the heels of the publication of The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators, and Bennett addresses such issues as our nation's cultural decline, steps to reverse this decline, the role of Christian conservatives in politics and society, and the role of his personal background in shaping his concern for moral values. Bennett claims that conservative Christians have "the most important role" in stemming the country's moral and cultural decline. According to Bennett, "they have kept in shape while the rest were losing their heads." Bennett makes a similar claim concerning his own moral, cultural, and political steadfastness in the midst of societal and political shifts:

Well, I don't think I changed. I think the Democratic party changed. In 1968 I was in Mississippi, and I said we should judge people as Martin Luther King, Jr. said--by the content of their character, not the color of their skin. I was regarded as a liberal. I say that today--and I'm regarded as a conservative. It's pretty much the same set of beliefs. If you believed what I believed in the early sixties, you would have been at home in the Democratic party. You wouldn't be any more.

The War on Drugs

We have noted previously that Bennett published several articles on the problem of drug abuse by students. In 1986 he authored a booklet, Schools Without Drugs, which is his most comprehensive statement on the subject. Bennett introduces the booklet with the claim that "the most serious threat to the health and well-being of our children is drug use." The handbook offers fact sheets of "the most reliable and significant findings available on drug use by school-age youth. It tells how extensive drug use is and how dangerous it is. It tells how drug use starts, how it progresses, and how it can be identified." Bennett also offers suggestions and strategies by which
students, parents, teachers and communities can fight drug abuse. The booklet concludes with a list of resources and organizations that the concerned parties can turn to for help. According to Bennett, the war against drugs is a battle of monumental proportions which requires drastic action from parents, educators and community leaders. “We must work to see that drug use is not tolerated in our homes, in our schools, or in our communities. Because of drugs, children are failing, suffering, and dying. We have to get tough, and we have to do it now.”

In 1994, Bennett wrote an editorial for the Wall Street Journal titled “Losing the Drug War Without a Fight.” In this piece he claims that the tough-minded drug policies initiated during the Reagan administration were responsible for a decrease in drug use among school aged youth in the 1980s. He argues that recent surveys (1993) indicate an upsurge in drug use among students. Bennett lays the blame for this upsurge on the Clinton administration’s lax attitude and “moral torpor” on the issue. For example, he cites Attorney General Janet Reno’s suggestions that mandatory drug sentences be reduced, President Clinton’s infamous comments on his experiments with marijuana, and Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders’ calls for the discussion of legalizing drugs. Bennett claims that these examples are significant because of “the mindset they reveal and the signals they send.” According to Bennett, social policy follows attitude. “Government officials, through legislation and public discourse, can legitimize and delegitimize certain acts. In a free society, few things matter more than speaking about the right things in the right way--and making moral common sense the touchstone of social policy.” Bennett contends that this attitude of the Clinton administration is particularly troubling in light of Clinton’s campaign pledge to “feel the pain” of those who suffer. According to Bennett, it is the nation’s poor who suffer most from the blight of drugs, and Clinton’s laxity on the issue will result in more drug use and more suffering.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

One of the primary limitations of this study concerns the literature covered. An exhaustive study of everything written on Bennett would be overwhelming. Because of Bennett’s high visibility and the extensive press coverage he has received, the literature is vast. For example, a recent search of a CD ROM data base revealed over 1,100 entries
on Bennett. These included stories on his actions as a government official, press releases, interviews, editorials, letters to newspapers and periodicals, and transcripts of his appearances on television news programs. Bennett has also conducted numerous interviews on radio programs, but to the best of my knowledge there is no reference work cataloging such interviews. I have attempted to familiarize myself with much of this material, and several of these sources provide us with a historical context and chronology of Bennett’s career. However, many of these articles contain spontaneous, unrehearsed, and unrefined comments made by and about Bennett. Hence, the review of the literature and my assessment of Bennett’s arguments will be confined to his substantive publications.

A second limitation concerns the scope of Bennett’s arguments which we will examine. The wide number of possible approaches to the topics which Bennett has addressed demands such limitations. For example, it is conceivable that a work on Bennett’s politics alone might fill several hundred pages. Such a work could include an examination of Bennett’s views on the politics of school choice, the politics of school financing, the politics of affirmative action, political correctness, the politicization of the curriculum, the politics of federal education policy under Reagan, and so on. Therefore I will limit my foci to one or two of the most significant issues in each of the categories of politics, culture, and values.

A third limitation involves the continuing stream of information which is available, both by Bennett and about him. In one sense this contributes to the timeliness of my study, but addressing the continuing developments in Bennett’s career becomes a difficult task. As one of my colleagues told me, “It is easier to do a study of a dead person.”

**ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

I have titled this study “A Critique of William Bennett’s Views on Politics, Culture, and Values in Schooling and Society.” As I stated previously, the ensuing three chapters will be organized around the topics of the politics of the culture wars, culture and the curriculum, and values in moral education. There is much overlap between these topics, and these topical distinctions are primarily a matter of organizational convenience. Concerning the phrase “in schooling and society,” I am using the term ‘schooling’ in a broad sense, referring to elementary, secondary, and
higher education. There is a vast literature on the topic of schooling vis a vis society, and of schooling as a social institution. Some of Bennett's arguments specifically pertain to educational policy, while others concern broader social concerns not directly related to schooling. Most of the arguments which we will examine are perhaps most effectively critiqued when viewed as pertaining to schooling and its social dimensions.

In the second Chapter, we will examine Bennett's take on the politics of the culture wars. I will first attempt to set forth Bennett's views on the political make-up of the conflict. That is, what--according to Bennett--are the political interests and goals of the competing parties, and what is at stake in the conflict? I will examine his contention that the culture war is being waged against a "liberal elite". I will also examine the "war" metaphor as it is used by Bennett, as well as the role of partisan politics in the current debates on culture. In so doing, I will argue that Bennett is engaging in "creedal politics," functioning as a "preacher" of conservative doctrine.

The third Chapter of this study will involve an examination of Bennett's views on the relation of culture to the curriculum. A common theme in Bennett's writings is that the curriculum should serve to transmit "our common culture," and to preserve "our cultural heritage." Bennett is of the opinion that the curriculum should emphasize the great works of Western civilization, and that such a traditional emphasis has been abandoned in most schools. Bennett's philosophical and pedagogical arguments on these matters will be assessed.

In Chapter Four we will examine Bennett's views on values in moral education. First we will examine his claims about the general state of moral education in the public schools. Particularly his contention that teachers have abandoned the directive teaching of traditional moral values for a relativistic brand of values clarification. I will also assess Bennett's arguments for directive moral education. Then I will examine the issue of ethical theory and moral education. It is my contention that the position of amoralism (as explicated by Richard Garner), provides a more satisfactory philosophical account of ethics than does the belief in intrinsic value and binding morality which underlies Bennett's approach to moral education. Moreover, I will offer an examination of Nel Noddings' Caring. This is a work which I will argue offers a promising alternative to Bennett's appeals to traditional conceptions of morality for guiding moral education.

In my concluding Chapter I will state and explain the major findings of the study, and also make suggestions for further study. I will state first some findings on the
methodology of this study, and then I will state my major findings for each chapter.
CHAPTER NOTES


2. Bennett, *De-Valuing*, back cover.


9. For example, in regard to the question of essence, Aristotle writes: "In the case of each different subject we shall have to determine the appropriate process of investigation. . . . For the facts which form the starting points in different subjects must be different." Aristotle, *Psychology*, in *The Pocket Aristotle*, ed. Justin D. Kaplan (New York: Washington Square Press, 1958), p. 51.

10. Here is a brief sketch of Bennett's biography and academic background: Bennett was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1943, earned his undergraduate degree from Williams College, his graduate degree in philosophy from the University of Texas, and his law degree from Harvard Law School. He has taught law and philosophy at the University of Southern Mississippi, The University of Texas, Harvard University, The University of Wisconsin, and Boston University. Bennett did his graduate study in philosophy under advisor John Silber. "In his 132-page doctoral thesis on 'Societal Obligation,' reflecting the influence of Silber's Kantianism, Bennett argued for basing social morality on 'rational judgment' rather than on subjective relativism or religion. His argument was thoroughly academic and ordinary, but in his concluding paragraph--as if to announce his own departure for a broader terrain--he suddenly introduced a citation from the controversial black novelist and essayist Ralph Ellison." Quoted from: John B. Judis, "Mister Ed: Or, Dr. Bennett at The Bridge," *The New Republic* 196 (April 27, 1987), p.16.

11. I am not using the terms 'ideological,' 'political,' or 'rhetoric' in a pejorative sense. These terms are being used in a descriptive sense, to refer to the fact that much of Bennett's writing and public speech are conscious attempts to promote and express his political and ideological views. Concerning the issue of ideology and education, see: Richard Pratt, *Ideology & Education* (New York: David McKay Co., 1977); Michael W. Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*, second edition (New York: Routledge, 1980).


15. Some of the specific sources are listed in the Bibliography, as are the relevant works by conservative educational writers such as Diane Ravitch, Lynne Cheney, Chester Finn, Roger Kimball, and Dinesh D'Souza.

16. As was noted by current Philosophy of Education Society president, Betty Sichel, the issue of "what philosophy of education is," has been a perennial concern of the Society's members. Betty Sichel, "President's Column," *PES Newsletter* (Feb., 1996), p.1.

17. James E. McClellan, *Toward an Effective Critique of American Education* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1968). Donna Kerr's work on educational policy and policy arguments is also quite helpful. She writes in the preface of her book *Educational Policy*: "This is a practical book, for it concerns what we actually do. It rests on the premise that the quality of our actions can be no greater than the quality of our understandings. More particularly, the quality of our making and implementing of educational policies depends, in large measure, upon the quality of our individual maps of the conceptual and normative terrain of educational policy." Donna Kerr, *Educational Policy: Analysis, Structure, and Justification* (New York: David McKay, 1976).


25. Bennett begins the concluding chapter of *The De-Valuing--"Reflections on Being in The Fight"--with his own list of what he has been referred to as in the press: "Who am I? If you believe what I've been called in print, I am: a medieval knight jousting against an immoral world; Knight of the Right; the Reagan administration's principal breaker of crockery; a bull in a china shop; a black sheep; the Lone Ranger; a loose cannon; a Neanderthal; a bully with a pulpit instead of a leader in a bully pulpit; the
man who put the bully back into the pulpit; the cowboy in the capital; a noisy ideologue; a motor-mouth; a pain in the neck; sexist; imperialist; bourgeois; ethnocentric; selfish; solipsistic; secretary of ignorance; secretary of private education; secretary smart-pants; secretary of religion; heaven-sent to silence the heathen; an ayatollah; Bennett the Hun; propagandist and ideological gangster; an ideological samurai; a divisive fear monger; elitist; populist; someone who rushes in where politicians fear to tread; a political pimp; a husky brawler; a walking rock and roll encyclopedia; philosopher and tough Irish cop; a pit bull with a brain; a tornado in a wheat field; someone who combined the ideals of Erasmus with the tactics of an alley fighter; the Cabinet's resident Dennis the Menace.” p. 225.


28. Fish, No Such Thing, p. 50.

29. Apple, Official Knowledge, p. 3.


33. It might be helpful to note a distinction here. Namely, the distinction between a descriptive account of particular episodes in Bennett's career, and the interpretation and assessment of the content of his claims.

34. Green, “Public Speech,” p. 379.

35. For example, Irving Copi cites these as examples of “fallacies of relevance.” He writes: “To argue that proposals are bad or assertions false because they are proposed or asserted by radicals (of the right or left) is to argue fallaciously and to be guilty of committing an argumentum ad hominem (abusive). This kind of argument is sometimes said to commit the Genetic Fallacy, because it attacks the source or genesis of the opposing position rather than that position itself.” Irving M. Copi, Introduction To Logic, seventh edition (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1986), p. 92.


37. On the role of respect in public discourse, Harvey Siegel writes: “Treating people with respect does not of course entail that we regard all beliefs or viewpoints as equally good. Treating a person with respect is compatible with regarding her views as


46. Bennett, Our Children.


52. Bennett, Our Children, pp. 9-10.

53. Bennett, Virtues, p. 11.

54. Bennett, The Index, pp. 115-17.


56. Bennett, The Index, p. 12.


79. This interview also includes a chronology of significant events in Bennett's "stormy years at the Education Department." "Curricular Reforms and College Costs: An Interview with Secretary Bennett," Chronicle of Higher Education 35 (Sept. 21, 1988): A25-27.


81. Cromartie, "Virtue Man.,” p. 33.


CHAPTER II
THE POLITICS OF THE CULTURE WARS

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will offer an examination of Bennett's views on the culture wars. I will attempt to give an account of Bennett's views on the political landscape of the culture wars. In developing this account, I will be concerned with the following questions: Who, according to Bennett, are the competing factions? What are their competing interests? How are the factions identified? How does Bennett characterize each side? What is the source of the contention? What form does this contention take? What is at stake in the culture wars? Whose interests are at stake?

In examining Bennett's views on these matters, it is helpful to remember that he is not only a commentator on the culture wars, but he has also been a central figure in many of the important battles. A man who, in deed and in word, has been an influential force in shaping and implementing social and educational policy. This, then, leads us to the important question, How does Bennett view the role and status of politics (organized social action), as a possible means for resolving this cultural conflict? What form, according to Bennett, must political action take if it is to ameliorate the social conditions of schooling and culture? In this examination I will also attempt to critically assess Bennett's positions on the politics of the culture wars.

WHO IS FIGHTING, AND WHAT FOR

Let us begin with a general sketch of Bennett's views on what the culture wars "are all about." Bennett begins his book, The De-Valuing of America, with a chapter entitled "Introduction to the Culture Wars." In this chapter Bennett relates his appointment as chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, which he marks as his initiation into the culture wars. "This was my baptism into politics, the first of many conflicts that can best be understood as a fight for the culture, the social and moral environment in which we raise our children, and the government's responsibility and limitations in this effort. The battle lines are being drawn and
redrawn, even now.” Bennett elaborates on his description of this conflict:

The battle for the culture refers to the struggle over the principles, sentiments, ideas, and political attitudes that define the permissible and the impermissible, the acceptable and the unacceptable, the preferred and the disdained, in speech, expression, attitude, conduct, and politics. This battle is about music, art, poetry, literature, television programming, and movies; the modes of expression and conversation, official and unofficial, that express who and what we are, what we believe, and how we act.¹

We see in Bennett’s sketch that while the conflict is often focused on particular public policies and forms of cultural expression, the real source of contention is a disagreement on the principles and standards by which we assess and evaluate public policy and cultural expression. In other words, what we have here is an ideologically colored meta-debate. On matters of public policy and cultural expression, to be sure, but more importantly the debate is over the terms of debate and the principles which—according according to Bennett—then function to dictate and assess particular policies and practices. Bennett reiterates time and again that he views the culture war as being at its most important and foundational level, a conflict of ideas.

Bennett gives us his credo for public life: “It is ideas and ideals that ultimately move society—ideas and ideals contained in the great works of Western civilization, and which students should encounter through education.” He often describes the cultural and political conflicts in terms of being a conflict of “political beliefs (as well as the moral and philosophical underpinnings of those beliefs).” He states that few things are of more importance for political leaders “than speaking about the right things in the right way.” Thus Bennett attributes Ronald Reagan’s electoral popularity to the fact that American voters sympathetically viewed Reagan as “a man of correct beliefs, of right sentiments.” I will pass at this point from commenting on the Orwellian overtones of Bennett’s remarks. Charges of engaging in “Newspeak” or “Doublethink” have become so common—from both sides in the debates—that such criticisms are clichés. But Bennett’s remarks do seem curious, coming as they do, from one who has been critical of “liberal orthodoxy,” and the “rigid dogma of politically correct speech and thought.” Evidently, Bennett does not object to strict adherence to political principles, per se, but rather he is objecting to the content of the beliefs and principles which he collectively attributes to Liberals, and which he summarily rejects. I am struck, at this point, by the ease with which Bennett neatly distinguishes the factions in terms of right and wrong. A veritable sheep and goats judgment of our nation’s polity.
We will examine the content of these political and philosophical beliefs a bit later. At this point, though, I would like to address not what beliefs are at issue, but whose beliefs. Again, this is simply acknowledging the political nature of the conflict. Toward this end, let us now examine how Bennett depicts the warring parties in this ideological battle. We will consider the politics, if you will, of the culture wars, according to Bennett.

Bennett contends that there are two opposing factions involved. One faction he labels as the "liberal elite," and the other faction he alludes to as "most Americans," or by the familiar locutions "us," "we," and "our." In addressing the matter of why there is a battle over culture, Bennett explains: "Part of the answer lies in understanding that there is a fundamental difference between many of the most important beliefs of most Americans and the beliefs of a liberal elite that today dominates many of our institutions and who therefore exert influence on American life and culture." Though there is clearly a programmatic element to this account, Bennett later brings the point home by characterizing the competing factions in the most elementary evaluative terms: "The lessons I have learned over and over again in the last decade are the theses of this book. The American people's sense of things is in most instances right; the liberal elite's sense of things in most instances wrong." 2 Granted, Bennett's account of the politics of the culture war is rather unsophisticated. It hinges on his positing a tendentious and dubious dichotomy between the liberal elites and most Americans. Rather than prematurely dismissing Bennett's arguments on these grounds, let us take a closer look at how Bennett's depiction of the opposing factions in the culture wars plays out in his discourse.

The first matter to which I turn my attention in this regard, is to establish what Bennett takes to be the identifying characteristics of the members of these two groups. The evaluative apppellations right and wrong are of little help in performing this task. Bennett attempts to describe and characterize the liberal elites in at least three ways. First he identifies them in terms of their highly visible and influential roles in shaping public discourse and policy. In this instance the emphasis seems to be on the eliteness of the liberals. Second, Bennett identifies the liberal elite in terms of their voting patterns. Specifically, he characterizes liberals according to their overwhelming tendency to vote for the Democratic candidate in recent presidential elections. Finally,
he characterizes the liberal elite by ascribing to them a particular philosophical and political mind set. Essentially, he characterizes them as ideological zealots who have abandoned sound political principles, the disinterested pursuit of reason, and common sense. We will now examine Bennett's account of the culture wars in regard to these three ways in which he characterizes the factions: Liberal elites versus mainstream Americans; Democrats versus Republicans; Those committed to Liberal political principles versus those committed to Conservative political principles.

THE LIBERAL ELITE

Bennett describes the supposed dominance of our social institutions by the liberal elite in the following way:

The elite are most often found among academics and intellectuals, in the literary world, in journals of political opinion, in Hollywood, in the artistic community, in mainline religious institutions, and in some quarters of the media. They exercise disproportionate influence because many people look to them (at least historically they have done so) as opinion makers and trendsetters. They write articles and books, give speeches, make movies, report stories, make news, and often interpret events; in short, they are the filter through which many Americans are informed about events. They exert a considerable amount of influence in official Washington--on the people who shape public discourse, who govern, who legislate, and who lead.3

Apparently it is not the eliteness of this group which troubles Bennett most, but rather it is their liberal political views. In effect, Bennett objects because the current group of liberal elites are not of the same stripe as traditional elites. I guess elites just aren't what they used to be. To support this contention, Bennett quotes a work entitled Elites in Conflict: Social Change in America Today, which was written by two scholars who Bennett refers to as "perhaps the nation's leading authorities on the study of American elite attitudes." Bennett cites these authors on the changing of the guard of America's elite: "The traditional elites of America used to be the repository of the bourgeois values of family, community, freedom, and self-restraint. Perhaps the impact of the new strategic elites is clearest in the erosion of the bourgeois values among those who have always been its keepers... We thus appear to be witnessing the gradual abdication of the... traditional underpinnings of American society."4

Allow me to pause here, and refresh our memory as to what I am attempting to do. We are examining Bennett's account of the competing factions in the culture wars.
Particularly his identification of “liberal elites” as one of the chief antagonists in this struggle. The first question I ask is, “Is this use of ‘elite’ accurate?” My answer to this question is, “Yes and no.” This terse and unsatisfactory answer owes more to the poorly posed question than to the subject being studied. In other words, a more promising avenue of inquiry into Bennett’s use of ‘elite’ lies not in simply determining if his claim “It is the case that elites are or do X.” but rather in considering “How is Bennett’s use of ‘elite’ functioning in theory and in practice?” I will give consideration to how his use of the term functions in regard to its social and political context, and I will also give consideration to how the use of the term functions on a conceptual and logical level. This methodological approach hearkens back to Scheffler’s dual analysis of slogans. We consider both the practical and theoretical dimensions of Bennett’s views because of the type of discourse involved. Bennett’s views are issued as policy arguments, policy, and public speech. As such, tools of theoretical and practical reason can be useful in understanding and assessing Bennett’s use of the phrase “liberal elites.”

Identifying the Liberal Elite

We will use the block paragraph from Bennett’s The Devaluing of America. (cited previously) as a working outline for our examination of his account of the “liberal elites.” Bennett begins his account with the ominous sounding Introduction, “The elite are most often found. . .” This phrase conjures images of clandestine conspirators, strategically placed in positions of influence in the centers of cultural production. Pockets of like-minded liberal elites who can be “found,” “identified,” and “exposed,” as were “communists” in the 1950s, or, as were the aliens in the 1960s TV show “The Invaders.” The aliens could be identified by their bent pinkie finger. Bennett seems confident in his ability to identify the liberal elite and appears to be zealously committed in his mission to call them to public accountability and moral censure. Bennett lists a number of contexts in which the liberal elite might be found, and in other sections of the book he fleshes out his charges of who the liberal elite are and how they function in these contexts.

To clarify Bennett’s use of ‘liberal elite’, let us look at some examples where he identifies groups and individuals as being “liberal elites.” For example, liberal elites are said to be found among academics and intellectuals, in the literary world, and in academic journals and journals of public opinion. He writes:
The liberal elite derive from, and draw support from, many quarters. The
academy is the one I know best, and it is symptomatic of many of the
attitudes to which I am referring. The fundamental convictions and even
aspirations of the majority of the American electorate are not at home--
indeed they are most unwelcome--among humanities and social science
faculty on many university campuses. Many academics have walled
themselves off from the rest of America. Much of this academic world
operates on a different set of assumptions as to what constitutes correct
social and moral norms. There is often an outright hostility toward the
middle class and the values it holds, which academics condescendingly
view as those of a philistine “bourgeois” society.7

He comments as follows on the influence of elite intellectuals in the last twenty-five
years:

Many of America’s intellectual elite perpetrated a doctrine of de facto
nihilism that cut to the core of American traditions. While the doctrine
never fully took root among most Americans, it did make significant
inroads. A lot of people forgot, and many others willfully rejected, the
most basic and sensible answers to first questions, to questions about
what contributes to our social well-being and prosperity, what makes for
individual character and responsibility, and what constitutes a “good
society.” 8

Bennett often speaks of the liberal elite as being synonymous with the
“educational establishment,” or the “political establishment.” Bennett portrays these
groups as being resistant to reform, and accuses them of subjecting their intellect to the
service of ideology. According to Bennett, these liberal elites are out of touch with the
normative positions of mainstream America, and many of the liberal elites harbor, and
espouse views which are inimical to the traditional philosophical, religious, moral, and
political beliefs of most Americans. Bennett also cites the artistic community,
Hollywood, and the news media as contexts where the liberal elite exercise considerable
influence.9 Bennett writes, “The art community is another example of those whose
opinions are both of, and help shape, the attitudes of the liberal elite. Perhaps nowhere
is there a more unremittingly hostile view of middle-class life and values than among the
artistic community and their spokesmen.” 10

Bennett does charge the news media with operating with a liberal bias, but his
treatment of the issue of ideological bias in the media is a little more sophisticated and
balanced, than is his analysis of ideological bias in the academic community. For
example, he notes the growing influence of conservative journalists and radio
commentators. He also notes that the journalist’s professional responsibility to “get the
story," often takes precedence over the reporter's personal political leanings.\textsuperscript{11}

**Conceptual Analysis of ‘Elite’**

These illustrations give us a better understanding of how Bennett is using 'liberal elite'. We see that the concept functions both descriptively and evaluatively in Bennett's discourse.\textsuperscript{12} It might be helpful, here, to engage in a little ordinary language philosophy. Allow me to give some examples of how we might use 'elite' in our ordinary, everyday language. During the Gulf War, we were informed that Sadaam Hussein’s "Elite Guard" had been stationed to protect strategic cites. Here ‘elite’ functions in a mixed manner. It refers descriptively to those soldiers who are members of a specific group; And, ‘elite’ also functions evaluatively in that it serves to commend this group of soldiers for being the best, strongest, bravest, most effective of Iraq’s troops. In the United States the Navy Seals and Green Berets are sometimes called "our nation’s elite fighting squads." At times we refer to groups or individuals who have attained high levels of achievement in a particular field as “the elite.” For example, the quarter-finalists in the NCAA basketball tournament are called “the elite 16.” The McDonald's high school all-American basketball game is advertised as “a gathering of the nation’s elite hoopsters.” Notice that in each of these examples 'elite' has a positive connotation.

There is another common usage of ‘elite’, which has some positive evaluative connotations, yet at the same time carries some negative evaluative baggage. For example, I might say, “Harvard is an elite academic institution.” In this statement, ‘elite’ may be functioning in a positive way. I may be commending them for their high academic standards, their esteemed tradition, and the illustrious achievements of their alumnae. At the same time, there is a long American tradition of mistrust and disdain for “elite” institutions.\textsuperscript{13} In such circles, elite institutions might be thought of as exclusive bastions of privilege, stuffy, high-brow, beyond one's access, pretentious, snooty, and stuck-up. Most of these sentiments can be summed up with the pejorative cognate of ‘elite’, namely, “elitist.”

There are contexts where academic institutions (Harvard, or Oxford), or artistic works (Shakespeare’s plays or Purcell’s minuets) are branded with the pejorative label “elitist.” On one of my stays in England I had the opportunity to attend a production of “The Merchant of Venice,” which featured Dustin Hoffman as Shylock. When I told my
British host that I had gone to see the play, he said to me, "Shakespeare is a bit too *shirty* for my taste." What he meant by this was that the atmosphere of the theater, the upper class audience attending the show, and the ancient prose of Shakespeare would be too formal, *cultured*, boring, irrelevant, and elitist. I found this attitude to be quite common with the families I knew in the working class section of Romford, England. "High culture," as it was often called, was not their cup of tea. Discos, punk rock clubs, the cinema, lively chorus singing at charismatic house churches were preferred by many of the youth, over Shakespearean plays, classical music concerts, the National Gallery, or the British Museum. This is not to say this disdain toward high culture was a purely generational matter. The youths' parents also often preferred popular culture (Cliff Richard, Glen Miller, Laurel and Hardy, Peter Sellers) to the more "refined" forms of cultural expression.

I see the same phenomena in the working-class circles I grew up in. For example, in some of the bars my band has played, any deviation from the barroom standards of ZZ Top, Lynard Skynard, and AC-DC is viewed with suspicion and as a possible invitation to trouble. To suggest to the bar patrons that they might want to accompany the band to enjoy a matinee showing of Berlioz's opera "The Damnation of Faust," the following Sunday, would be laughable, or perhaps a prelude to a fight. What I am attempting to illustrate here are cases where the label "elitist" is used in a pejorative sense to refer to works of culture and cultural institutions which are viewed as inaccessible, but also as privileged in the sense that when compared to popular forms of cultural expression, the old classics simply can't deliver the goods. "Led Zeppelin could blow any classical orchestra off the stage." "Can Shakespeare's plays even compete with Steven Spielberg's films?" "Milton, Chaucer, and Donne wrote corny, dated, white bread verse, which can't compare with the visceral power of many of today's rap lyrics." As Chuck Berry sang, "Roll over Beethoven, tell Tchaikovsky the news."¹⁴

Though I don't necessarily endorse each of these claims, I do feel they reflect the sentiments of many. These examples raise important questions concerning culture and the content of the curriculum. For instance, the inclusion in the curriculum of many of these classical forms of cultural expression is advocated by Bennett. Yet other educational theorists refer to these classic forms of cultural expression as "elite knowledge."¹⁵ Bennett does not apply the term 'elite', to these works. Rather, he claims
these classic works of Western civilization comprise "the best that has been said, thought, written, and otherwise expressed about the human experience." According to Bennett, these classic works are "worth knowing, worth defending, worth believing." We will explore these questions on culture and the curriculum in the next chapter. For now, I will make the point that, in using the term 'elite', Bennett is playing on the negative baggage associated with the term and is applying the term to those with whom he has a political disagreement.

**Labeling the "Liberal Elite"**

When labeling individuals as "liberal elites," Bennett surely is aware that this would not be a self-ascriptive label for these individuals. Just as no one says "Hello, I am a false prophet," or "I am a member of a cult," so there are no individuals who refer to themselves as "leading members of the liberal elite." As Hunter makes clear in his book *Culture Wars*, the attempt to define one's opponent is an important feature of the current debates. Both sides often employ loaded labels which function to discredit their opponents, but labels which are often descriptively misleading and inaccurate. "By portraying the opposition as extremist, each side implicitly maintains that the other is a minority removed from the mainstream of American life and that they, instead, represent the interests of the majority."  

Clearly, there is much of this at work in Bennett's rhetoric. He claims to represent the moral sentiments and political convictions of "mainstream America," of "decent hard working Americans." He is a voice for reclaiming "our cultural legacy," and our traditional moral, philosophical, and religious values. His is a voice of reason, common sense, moral order, and he upholds traditional standards of what is right and wrong, good and bad. He speaks for God, family, and country; our God, our children, our culture, "our country, land that I love." At this point I can imagine someone might object that I am giving Bennett's rhetoric a rather cynical interpretation. Perhaps--it might be suggested--Bennett is simply using the first person locutions 'our' and 'we' in a broad universal sense. As in, "we are all children of God," or, "we are all fellow Americans," or "after all, we are all human beings and we are in this thing together."
A serious examination of Bennett’s writings, however, will not allow him to get off the hook so easily. He does not use ‘our’ and ‘we’ in such a universal sense, but rather ‘we’ is most often defined and identified in opposition to ‘they’. ‘ours’ to ‘theirs’, and the “views of most Americans” are presented in opposition to those of the liberal elite. This loaded depiction and the use of this simplistic and dubious dichotomy is a common feature in Bennett’s rhetoric about culture and society. It has been noted by critics that this “us/them” motif has often taken an aggressive programmatic bent in the conservative discourse on social and cultural issues. Michael Apple offers the following interpretation of how this rhetoric plays out in the current public debates:

Behind the conservative restoration is a clear sense of loss: of control, of economic and personal security, of the knowledge and values that should be passed on to children, of visions of what counts as sacred texts and authority. The binary opposition of we/they becomes very important here. “We” are law abiding, hard working, decent, virtuous, and homogeneous. The “theys” are very different. They are “lazy, immoral, permissive, heterogeneous.” These binary oppositions distance most people of color, women, gays, lesbians, and others from the community of worthy individuals. The subjects of discrimination are now no longer those groups who have been historically oppressed, but are instead the “real Americans” who embody the idealized virtues of a romanticized past. The “theys” are undeserving. They are getting something for nothing. Policies supporting them are “sapping our way of life,” most of our economic resources, and creating government control of our lives.20

Bennett has been charged with being a notorious purveyor of the rhetorical devices of demonizing his opponents, and of wrapping his own rhetoric in a cloak of honorific symbolic associations. Many of Bennett’s critics have called attention to this tendency in Bennett’s writings and public statements. In her article “A Not-So-Tearful Farewell To William Bennett,” educator Susan Ohanian writes: “Typical of the dichotomist, Bennett takes a complex situation and divides it into two poles. If you aren’t for him, then you must be against him. And, as Bennett has cleverly constructed his position, if you are against him, then you are against decency and morality, against married motherhood and deregulated apple pie.”21

A Conflict Between Elites

What I have attempted to demonstrate thus far, is that one of the ways Bennett describes the political dimensions of the culture war is in terms of it being a political and ideological struggle between the “liberal elite” and “mainstream America.” I have argued that his use of this terminology is misleading and inaccurate in regard to its function in
describing the political realities of the conflict. At the least, 'liberal elite' is not a self-ascriptive label. I have contended that Bennett is positing a dubious and tendentious dichotomy between the "liberal elite," and "mainstream America." Allow me, at this point, to make one additional observation on the function of 'elite' in Bennett’s discourse. Namely, his rhetoric obscures the fact that both the liberal and conservative factions in the culture debates have leaders and spokesmen who might accurately be described as "elites." In Culture Wars, Hunter makes a compelling case that the culture war is not a battle between elites and mainstream Americans, but rather between opposing elites. Elites "are the ones who create the concepts, supply the language, and explicate the logic of public discussion. They are the ones who define and redefine the meaning of public symbols. Public discourse, then, is largely a discourse of elites."22

According to Hunter, elites from both sides produce the cultural and symbolic capital with which the culture wars are waged. It is worth noting, that Hunter distinguishes two groups among the elites. Academic intellectuals, and "knowledge workers." His explanation of this distinction, and his comments on how the respective groups function in shaping public discourse and policy is instructive:

Those who come immediately to mind are the intellectuals, who reside in the halls of academia, devoting their careers to research, writing, consulting, lecturing, and educating young adults. Within the vast realm of higher education, the academics whose work contributes the most toward the establishment of public culture are those in the humanities, social sciences, public administration, theology, and law. Yet as important as university-based intellectuals are to the development of public discourse, their contribution tends to be fairly abstract and distant. A history of public debate among academics alone would amount to an intellectual one, following the relatively obscure personalities and the somewhat rarified fads and fashions of the ivory tower-deconstructionism, neoirish, death of God theologies, structuralism, and so on. This is not to suggest that academic developments and debates are in any way frivolous or inconsequential. They are anything but trifling. Nevertheless, discussion at this level of abstraction is rarely accessible to a national audience: the issues that concern these intellectuals have little immediate relevance to the shaping of widely recognized and broadly contended public symbols.23

Concerning elite knowledge workers, Hunter writes:

Much more influential than university-based scholars, then, are the more practically oriented "knowledge workers": public policy specialists located in think tanks, special interest lobbyists, public interest lawyers, independent writers and ideologues, journalists and editors, community organizers, and movement activists—the national and regional leadership of grass-roots social and political organizations.
Other knowledge workers include the clergy, theologians, and religious administrators of all denominations and faiths.  

Hunter's comments on the role of elites in the culture wars offer us some telling insights into Bennett's treatment of the debates. First, Hunter's work shows that Bennett's attempt to portray the culture war as a battle of mainstream Americans against a liberal elite, is inaccurate. Bennett's inaccurate account also serves to obscure the fact that Bennett is himself an influential or "elite" conservative leader. Bennett has been an influential figure both in elite circles of academia, and as a knowledge worker. What is interesting here, is that Bennett has failed to achieve any degree of success or influence as an academic or as a philosopher. His influence and notoriety have come mainly from his activity as a knowledge worker. A common target of Bennett's rhetoric, as a knowledge worker, has been the putative dominance of liberal orthodoxy and political correctness in academic circles, and the putative decline in standards in the humanities. In brief, while he is leveling charges at academia, he does not do so within an academic context. That is, he is not submitting his claims to the rigors, scrutiny, and standards of assessment and peer review of established academic disciplines.

The irony of Bennett's "unrigorous" criticisms of academia has often been noted by critics. In his review of "To Reclaim a Legacy," Jonathan Z. Smith comments on Bennett's claims:

He is led to make some of the shriller statements in his Report because he sees himself as fighting "a collective loss of nerve and faith" in the academy. In his view, "intellectual authority came to be replaced by intellectual relativism as the guiding principle of the curriculum." (Merely make the substitution "moral authority came to be replaced by secular humanism" and you have the genealogy of his morals.) This "relativism" is a "self-inflicted wound" on the body of contemporary education. It is his claim that it legitimates the subordination of everything to "contemporary prejudice," and to the belief that "all meaning is subjective and relative to one's own perspective." Nonsense! This is to trivialize one of the major issues of Western thought, one that has been central for centuries. As a putative philosopher, Bennett knows better.

Another such criticism of Bennett came from Harvard President, Derek Bok, concerning Bennett's speech given as part of a celebration of the university's 350th anniversary (Oct., 1986). The speech was critical of Harvard's core curriculum and the price of tuition at the school. Bok's response to Bennett included the following remarks:
"Having claimed the privilege to speak freely in this forum, Mr. Bennett must also live by the intellectual standards of the academy: meticulousness in the respect for available evidence, care in stating conclusions, perceptiveness in exploring issues beyond the level of superficiality and cant. By these standards, I fear that he has fallen short of what higher education needs and expects from a public servant of his status." Later in the piece, Bok comments on the debate over the curriculum at Harvard: "It is one thing to discuss differences between two established curricular philosophies and quite another to insist that curricula that depart from one's own preferences are merely sham and rhetoric." 27

In her review of Our Children & Our Country, Amy Gutmann calls attention to the hypocrisy of Bennett's application of standards of assessment to the academy, which he fails to apply to his own work. She writes, "Bennett's most publicized claims display a disregard for the whole truth, for that standard to which he holds the educational establishment but from which he evidently exempts himself." And later, she adds, "Whether or not we agree with the policies Bennett defends, we should be disturbed by the way he defends them: selectively citing evidence, cloaking partisan policies in the rhetoric of self-evident truth, sidestepping careful argument, insinuating that millions of citizens who disagree with those policies are un-American, that their points of view are not worthy of serious consideration." 28

Bennett's Objections to The Liberal Elite

Though we have argued that Bennett's account of the liberal elite is flawed and inaccurate, it may be in order at this point to take a closer look at his normative judgments against the liberal elites. That is, given the evaluative function of 'liberal elite', what is Bennett's justification for applying this term? In other words, what, according to Bennett, is wrong with the liberal elite? 29 Someone who is labeled as "a liberal elite," might ask Bennett, "Why have you identified me with this pejorative label? This is not a term I apply to myself. Is it something I have said? What have we done which you find so objectionable?" Bennett tells us that the liberal elite "write articles and books, give speeches, make movies, report stories, make news, and often interpret events." But clearly, there is nothing inherently objectionable with these activities.

Bennett has, himself been engaged in most of these public activities. Though Bennett
hasn’t made movies. PBS is producing an animated series based on The Book of Virtues.

Bennett then claims that the liberal elite function as “the filter through which many Americans are informed about events. They exert a considerable amount of influence in official Washington—on the people who shape public discourse, who govern, who legislate, and who lead.” As we noted earlier, though, Bennett does not object to the existence of an elite group of influential intellectuals who shape public policy. It is a social function that somebody has to fulfill. What he objects to is this group of liberal elites. For example, we noted earlier that Bennett viewed the traditional elites with favor. Allow me at this time to make a point of clarification. Though Bennett is playing on the negative baggage of the term ‘elite’ when he applies it to his political enemies, he exhibits no aversion to the idea of elitism. He praises the good old days when traditional elites guided social policy in accord with time-honored moral, philosophical, and religious principles. Bennett also advocates a curriculum which features the transmission of elite knowledge. The gist of Bennett’s objection is that today’s liberal elite are their elite, not ours. I should also note that in discussing the role of elites in shaping public policy, Bennett further distorts the picture by giving scant attention to the influence and power wielded by corporate lobbyists and the well-financed conservative think tanks he is closely allied with. In other words, there are elites of all stripes and political commitments.

We can gain insight into Bennett’s objections to the liberal elite with a closer examination of the following claim: “They [the liberal elite] exercise disproportionate influence because many people look to them (at least historically they have done so) as opinion makers and trendsetters.” The key phrase here is “disproportionate influence.” Bennett is not using ‘disproportionate’ in a strict statistical sense (as in, “in proportion to their number in the population”), but in a normative sense. That is, according to Bennett, the liberal elite exert an influence on public policy and culture, which can not be justified as a legitimate expression of “the will of the people.” We have seen that Bennett portrays the liberal elite as being hostile to the political, religious, moral, aesthetic, and educational views of most Americans. As a result, the elites have abrogated any claim they might make for political legitimacy or intellectual credibility. Their putative influence on culture and public policy is disproportionate to the degree of popular consent for their views. Hence we can see the reason why Bennett finds the
"emperor with no clothes" metaphor such an attractive analogy to apply to the liberal elite and those public institutions which he claims are under "liberal tutelage." These are the institutions which Bennett exhorts mainstream Americans to fight for, and to reclaim.

THE 'WAR' METAPHOR

This leads us to a final consideration of how this "elite-majority" dichotomy functions in Bennett's political discourse. We have seen that he characterizes and depicts his political opponents in terms that are descriptively misleading, evaluatively loaded, and not self-ascriptive. I would like to pause here, and call attention to my use of 'opponents' in the last sentence. I had first written 'enemies,' and thought it seemed too harsh a term. I replaced 'enemies' with 'opponents,' but was still not satisfied. The reason? I was uncomfortable with the way the polemic metaphors of the culture war (itself a metaphor) had saturated my "way of viewing" the conflict (another metaphor), and also, in my ability to explain the phenomena in different terms. I feared that I had been hexed by language, "taken in" by the illusory strictures of language and categories, captured by the polemic metaphor.31 For now, however, I would like to take on the modest task of briefly analyzing some of the metaphors involved in our discussion.

In the Philosophy of Education course I have taught the last four years, I always devote a lecture to an examination of metaphors. I always begin with the question, "What is a metaphor? Will someone stick their neck out, go out on a limb, and take a stab at shedding some light on this question?" Occasionally a few students will chuckle when they realize I am using metaphors to introduce a discussion of metaphors. Some will answer that a metaphor is a comparison, and others suggest the grammatical distinction between similes ("your eyes are like road maps"), and metaphors ("your eyes are road maps"), which is taught in many literature classes. I stipulate that I am using 'metaphor' in a very broad sense, to refer to any figurative use of language which suggests a comparison between two things. I then ask the students for examples of metaphoric conceptions of education. It soon becomes evident that metaphors are pervasive in educational discourse. We have metaphoric conceptions of the student (a blank slate, a sponge, a flower), of the teacher-student relationship and the learning process (one student suggested that our class was analogous to martial arts training for
linguistic sparring), and of the school (corporate metaphors, clinical metaphors, ecclesiastical metaphors). As the class discussion continues we see that metaphors play an integral part in shaping and directing the way educators view the nature of teaching and learning, in determining the goals they are pursuing, and in selecting the means to achieve these goals. Thus, the metaphoric conceptions we "buy into" are instrumental in shaping, interpreting, justifying, explaining, and assessing our educational policy and practice. The first step, then, in critically assessing the role of metaphors in educational discourse is to recognize that we are dealing with metaphors.

Israel Scheffler's work on the analysis of educational metaphors is instructional at this point. Scheffler suggests a four step procedure for the critical assessment of metaphors. Such an assessment is in order in cases where metaphorical conceptions serve as the foundation for normative arguments on educational policy and practice. The first step is to explicitly identify what is being compared. In our case, Bennett is comparing public debates over social and educational policy to a war. The "war" metaphor has many cognates and logical extensions as it is used in the discourse: It is "us against them"; "they are our opponents, our enemies"; dialogue, discussion, and debate are reduced to "battles and conflicts"; legitimate disagreements are depicted as "drawing lines in the sand"; cultural and philosophical positions are to be "reclaimed, defended, fought for"; there will be "winners and losers."

Scheffler suggests that we then attempt to determine the strengths of the metaphor. Are there ways in which the metaphor "works"? Is it apt? That is, are there ways in which the metaphor provides us with insights and understanding of conceptual and social relations? I would like to slightly modify this step in the metaphor analysis, and rather than asking "what are the strengths of this metaphor?" I will attempt to show some of the ways Bennett's reliance on this metaphor functions in his rhetoric. In other words, given that Bennett is endorsing and utilizing the metaphor, how does this color his policy arguments and his public discourse? In answering the question I will also be making comments on what I take to be the weaknesses of the "war" metaphor as it is used by Bennett (this is step three of Scheffler's metaphor analysis).

My first observation is that in a war there are opposing "sides". It is "us against them." liberal elites against mainstream Americans, Democrats against Republicans, liberals against conservatives. We can identify some of the consequences of thinking in
terms of these binary oppositions. One of which, is that it functions to obscure complex political and philosophical differences and reduce them to an "all too neat" dichotomy. This has been discussed as "the politics of false choices" in Dionne's book, *Why Americans Hate Politics.* An extension of this is the polarizing effect which the reliance on the war metaphor promotes. The old labor union song asked, "Which side are you on, boy?" The metaphorical portrayal of our current cultural debates as a culture war compels the participant to choose a side. It is the only game in town. Once a side is chosen, the participant then proceeds to justify one's identification with one side (we are for family values, traditional morality, God and Country), and to justify one's opposition to the enemy (theirs are the failed programs that caused our social pathologies, they are relativists and nihilists who are hell bent on undermining all that we hold dear).

Such diametric opposition is reinforced and inflamed by the polemic rhetoric of Bennett. His depiction of the current policy debates in the loaded terms we have been examining, functions to unduly polarize the issues, and to arouse unwarranted and unproductive animus between the so-called "sides". He gives lip service to the need for serious debate and dialogue on the issues, but such dialogue is thwarted by his polemic approach. He cites with favor the old political distinction between "the principle of compromise and the refusal to compromise on principle." However, as he depicts the culture war, there is no place for compromise. Since Bennett contends the debates are over foundational commitments to "first principles," any compromise is viewed as a capitulation to the enemy, or "a loss of nerve." Bennett thus wages war against the liberal elite. And as with any war, there will eventually be winners and losers. And to the winner goes the spoils. This is what Bennett is attempting to achieve, as this quote clearly demonstrates: "Those whose beliefs govern our institutions will in large measure win the battle for the culture. And whoever wins the battle for the culture gets to teach the children. This cultural and institutional reclamation project will not be easy."34

We have shown that their are important ways in which the use of the "war" metaphor is inapt. At some point, every metaphor suffers from what has been called "the analogical breakdown." That is, the comparison can only be taken so far. Or, as I was taught in my Hermeneutics class in seminary, "be careful not to let that metaphor get up and walk on all fours." This is significant in assessing Bennett's depiction of the
current debate over cultural issues. This metaphor pervades his discourse. Not only are there flaws in the metaphor on a conceptual level, but as Bennett defends his positions like a good soldier, his metaphoric conception of the debates results in flawed policy. And as we have often heard, “all is fair in love and war,” or as Harvard’s Charles W. Eliot said—and Bennett is fond of quoting—“in the campaign for character, no auxiliaries are to be refused.”

True to the Barry Goldwater dictum, “excess in pursuit of virtue is no vice.”

Bennett goes to war. Thus, in his quest to “win the war” at any cost, he can endorse school prayer and the teaching of religious principles in public schools.

At this point I would like to say to Bennett, “it’s only a metaphor!” But he appears to have been thoroughly captured. The culture war metaphor underlies many of his normative claims. It serves as a guide and a gauge for his rhetoric and his policy. This is why I earlier expressed my trepidation about being confined to discussing the issues in martial terminology. As Cornell Hamm warns us in his discussion of educational metaphors: “We should be cautious, though, against letting certain metaphors become mindless slogans and ‘thought stoppers’ because of orthodoxy and dogmatism that builds around them. And it is precisely when such orthodoxy builds around certain metaphors that initial insights get lost, analogies are pushed too far, and the overall effect of the use of the metaphor becomes damagingly misleading.”

There are alternatives. And this is Scheffler’s fourth step in the critical assessment of metaphors; to suggest alternative metaphors. Off the top of my head I can think of several promising metaphoric conceptions: familial metaphors, collegial metaphors, the neighbor metaphor, the experiment metaphor, man to man, person to person, philosopher to philosopher, educator to educator. Perhaps the consideration and utilization of these metaphors in our social theorizing and public speech might prove to be conducive to dialogue, sharing, and understanding. Pursuit of the war metaphor has proven to promote polarization, animosity, and a tragic and unnecessary deterioration of dialogue on these important issues. I would urge Bennett to at least consider the alternatives. Give peace a chance.

PARTISAN POLITICS

Bennett also discusses the culture wars in terms of partisan electoral politics.
Bennett claims that the putative ideological distance between the liberal elites and the majority of Americans is expressed by the uniformity of voting patterns among the liberal elite. He cites a study which indicates that the "public interest elite" (key individuals publicly identified with public interest movements in lobbying, in law, in academia, and in foundations) have voted overwhelmingly for the Democratic candidate in recent presidential elections. Bennett claims that "This remarkable uniformity is but one example of how distant Democrats are from the political beliefs (as well as the moral and philosophical underpinnings of those beliefs) of the rest of the electorate." Bennett is careful to note that he is not equating the liberal elites with registered Democrats:

The elite are people who, unlike the rank-and-file Democratic party that I came from, are often not at home with the traditional beliefs of most Americans; they tend to be skeptical and mistrustful of American society. Their measure is not simply the extent to which our society falls short of realizing its ideals, but sometimes the wholesale rejection of American ideals. Marked by alienation, suspicion, and doubt, the liberal elite call into question what is commonly thought of as "the American dream."38

The New Republican Coalition

Again, we see Bennett portraying politics in blatantly evaluative and tendentious terminology. He does, though, offer us the accurate observation that there has been a significant realignment in partisan politics in America. The conservative movement in the Republican party (the two are almost synonymous) has had great success in securing the support of white, male, lower middle class, and culturally and religiously conservative voters. Sometimes referred to as "the Bubba vote," this pocket of voters had previously been the backbone of the New Deal and post World War II Democratic coalition. Stated simply, we see a Republican coalition comprised of economic and cultural conservatives. In her thorough account of conservative politics in the post-war era, Sara Diamond comments: "At the start of the Cold War era, a small group of conservative intellectuals sought to build a strong movement based on their bedrock principles of economic libertarianism, moral traditionalism, and anticommunism. At the time, the forerunners of the New Right could not have foreseen the extent to which their ideas and policy preferences would galvanize untold thousands of activists over the course of many decades."39

Clearly, the politician who was most successful at exploiting this coalition, and also the most visible expression of the coalition's contradictions was Ronald Reagan.

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"Ronald Reagan was a genius at making a virtue of contradiction. Young investment bankers who looked kindly on cocaine and fundamentalist factory workers who saw a world full of sin and corruption could vote for Ronald Reagan with equal enthusiasm. And they did."40 E.J. Dionne argues that conservatives were able to galvanize popular support and fracture the New Deal coalition with the rise of racial and cultural politics in the 1960s. And Ronald Reagan was the leader who instantiated the neoconservative’s political theory:

Reagan himself understood clearly that building a conservative majority required the votes of both factory workers and investment bankers. In this sense, he was only following the teachings of his friends at National Review who sought to unite the libertarians and the traditionalists, the Wallace voters and the Nixon voters. But Reagan’s presidential campaigns did more than follow a formula: they actually helped create a new politics out of what had once been just a theory.41

In his book Dead Right, David Frum argues that it was the Republicans’ ability to appeal to voters’ concern with moral and cultural issues which ensured their electoral triumph in the 1994 Congressional election. He writes:

The most dramatic Republican surge was recorded among white male voters earning between $15,000 and $30,000 a year and, to a slightly lesser extent, their wives. These voters felt that the values they treasured, the culture they had grown up in, and their own economic prospects were under attack. They felt that their government ignored them, and that it supported and protected people—from the lewd surgeon general, to the condom-distributing teachers at the local school, to the self-righteous artists subsidized by the National Endowment for the Arts—who despised them.42

Stuart Hall has referred to this political strategy of the conservatives as “authoritarian populism.”43 Michael Apple calls this approach to politics "arithmetical particularism." According to Apple, this strategy “relies on making appeals to specific sectors of a population; e.g., appeals based on questions about race and affirmative action, entrepreneurial values, anti-union sentiment, standards, sacred knowledge and authority based on fundamentalist religious principles, the family, and so forth. It is thus not a mobilization around a unified program, but an attempt to divide people along particularist lines and then bring them under the umbrella of leadership provided by powerful rightist groups."44 E.J. Dionne also call attention to this strategy, making note of how it was used by Ronald Reagan in his successful bid to attract voters: both those who identified with traditional values, and those whose interests lied with "casino
capitalism." "Ronald Reagan profited by speaking fondly of both. The key to Reagan's popularity lay less in his ability to blend the two into a coherent creed, ... than in his ability to blend the skill at using these two sets of ideas to send different messages to different constituencies." 45

With this approach to politics we see less reliance on the traditional political approach of appealing to the voter's immediate economic interests. In fact, with a creedal approach to politics we see that voters may be prone to voting their ideological commitments at the expense of their economic interests. An obvious case being trade union members who voted for Ronald Reagan because of "his stand on moral and social issues" (the Teamsters actually endorsed Reagan in 1980). Again, we see that Reagan did not need to resolve the inherent contradictions of supply-side economics and traditional moral and social values, he appealed to both, and captured both constituencies.

We see this strategy employed primarily in electoral politics at the national level. The 1994 Congressional elections, in which the Republicans gained the majority in both the Senate and the House, indicate this approach still provides great electoral clout. Politics at the local level have remained largely concerned with immediate provincial matters, rather than on issues of philosophical and ideological commitment. However, an important exception to this is the aggressive and well-funded efforts of national groups--most notably the Christian Coalition--to gain control of local school boards. 46 We see a clear expression of the Republicans' appeals to particular ideological commitments in their use of creedal statements. Namely, The Contract With America and the subsequent Contract With The American Family. 47 The latter was drafted by leaders of Christian organizations such as The Christian Coalition and The Family Research Council. The Christian Coalition marshaled its resources to campaign for the Republicans, and in return, the Republican leadership has pledged to pursue policy and legislation that promotes "family values."

These developments indicate an attempt on the part of the Right to achieve an all encompassing ideological story which resolves the contradictions of their economic theory and policy, as well as their social, moral, and philosophical commitments. This has been called a quest for a "national popular will" and a "hegemonic accord." Michael Apple writes, "A new hegemonic accord, then, is reached now. It combines dominant
economic and political elites intent on "modernizing" the economy, white working-class and middle-class groups concerned with security, the family, and traditional knowledge and values, and economic and cultural conservatives." Neoconservative intellectuals such as Bennett, have taken it as their task to provide an intellectual legitimation, justification, articulation, and promulgation of conservatism. A conservatism which finds perhaps its clearest expression in Republican electoral politics at the national level.

This is an admittedly brief sketch of partisan politics, but I think the points I have alluded to are important in understanding Bennett's claim that the two parties have changed. Indeed they have. These changes have paved the way for Bennett's entrance into the political arena. I will argue that the recent Republican approaches to cultural, racial, and gender politics mark the advent of "creedal politics," and that Bennett has taken it as his calling and mission to preach the gospel of conservatism. In his book Dead Right, David Frum offers us a survey of contemporary Republican politics. He discusses three approaches to politics in the party: Optimists, who are focused on economic policy grounded in free-market principles, led by Jack Kemp; Moralists, who understand our social problems, and their solution, as being rooted in morality, character development, and virtuous conduct. Bennett is cited as the leading moralist. "Bennett does not care overmuch for the detail of politics. He perceives his own role as that of a preacher rather than a legislator."49

Finally, we have the Nationalists, who are typified by Pat Buchanan. I would contend that the rhetoric of Buchanan and his ilk, is the logical extension of a politics of "right and wrong," "us and them." Bennett has been critical of his fellow Gonzaga high school (A Jesuit school in Washington D.C.) alumnus, Pat Buchanan. Bennett recently claimed that Buchanan's rhetoric was "bordering on fascism." Buchanan responded that Bennett was "no longer his friend." On another occasion, Bennett referred to Buchanan's politics as "an us and them kind of thing." The New York Times mistakenly printed the quote as "an S and M kind of thing."50

**NEOCONSERVATIVE INTELLECTUALS**

With the increasing importance of cultural issues in contemporary Republican
politics there has been an increasing influence of neoconservative intellectuals in
shaping their public policy. Bennett arose from the ranks of these neoconservative
intellectuals, and he "may have been the most successful case of a neoconservative who
became a right-wing hero." Bennett was able to convince the wealthy members of the Republican party (of
whom there were not a few) that it was in their interest to finance the "war of ideas."
This resulted in the proliferation of institutions and organizations which were dedicated
to the dissemination of conservative ideas. This corporate financing of conservative
ideology in schools has been described in less charitable terms:

The role of right-wing movement activism, from the 1950s tracts published
by the Foundation for Economic Education to the promotion of 1980s
supply-side theory, has been to sustain ideological arguments that make a
system based on sharp class inequalities seem, somehow, just. For their
role in sustaining capitalism's legitimacy, right-wing organizations have
enjoyed a virtually bottomless pit of corporate largesse. That resource has
given the Right the wherewithal to participate significantly in electoral
politics.

Kristol claimed that "you can only beat an idea with another idea." We see this
same sentiment expressed in the motto of the Heritage Foundation (one of the most
influential conservative think tanks), "Ideas have consequences." Bennett, who is a
Distinguished Fellow of Cultural Studies at the Heritage Foundation, has taken as his
credo in public life: "It is ideas and ideals that ultimately move society." It was Irving
Kristol who took an interest in Bennett and launched his political career when he
suggested Bennett for the directorship of the National Endowment for the Humanities.
At the time (1981), Bennett was the thirty-seven-year-old director of the National
Humanities Center, a think tank for scholars in the humanities, located in the Research
Triangle Park in North Carolina. William Kristol, Irving's son, was Bennett's chief of
staff at the Department of Education. The primary political function of Bennett and his
fellow neoconservative intellectuals has been to legitimize the conservative’s political vision. To provide an intellectual foundation and justification for their public policy, and ultimately to convince the American electorate that the conservatives are, to quote the late Howard Cosell, “telling it like it is.” In this quest to achieve a national consensus (or at least a solid electoral majority), Bennett takes an approach that lies somewhere between the cloistered academic approach of someone such as conservative political scientist James Q. Wilson, and the blatantly populist approach of Rush Limbaugh. Bennett is one who has academic and intellectual credentials and connections, and he sees his role as preaching the creed of conservatism to the general public. His public speech involves both the attempt to articulate a philosophical defense of conservative positions (as an apologist), and to bring this message to the masses (as an evangelist).

CREEDAL POLITICS

Allow me to elaborate on what I mean by the term ‘creedal politics’. In his 1981 book, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony*, political scientist Samuel P. Huntington coined the phrase “a politics of creedal passion.” By this he was referring to periods in American history involving “intense efforts by large numbers of Americans to return to first principles.” Creedal politics involves an approach to politics in which candidates identify themselves, and appeal to voters, in terms of commitments to foundational philosophical and ideological beliefs: creedal tenets, if you will. These creedal tenets include foundational beliefs about the family, religion, education, economics, and government, to name a few.

As an observer of electoral politics in recent years, I have noticed a similarity between fundamentalist Christians’ commitment to doctrine and their commitment to vote for candidates who were “pro-family,” and who took a “biblical position” on the issues. Not coincidentally, these candidates are invariably Republican. What we have here are people who are committed to first principles for ordering their voting and political involvement. It is true that ideas have consequences. No one would deny that. However, for conservatives who embrace this motto, their logic usually takes the following route. Given that ideas and ideals are of principal importance, then it is requisite that we choose to adopt and abide by the “right ideas.” This assumes that the
right principles can be identified and distinguished from "wrong ideas." As I noted earlier, this is in fact the terminology Bennett employs in labeling the opposing sides in the culture war. Given, then, that "we" are committed to the correct first principles, those who are not with us are against us. "They" are either intellectually, morally, or spiritually deficient, and therefore in need of conversion. They need to be "convinced" of the error of their ways. Or perhaps, "they" are also thoroughly committed to "their" first principles. In these cases "they" are not simply mistaken and in need of persuasion, but must be regarded as enemies who must be defeated.

Thus we see that the commitment to first principles plays a similar role in both fundamentalist religious thought, and in conservative political ideology. In both cases, the first principles comprise a world view which serves an explanatory and prescriptive function. To the degree that we can characterize "sides" in the culture war, perhaps the most satisfactory account is given by James Davison Hunter. He argues that conflicting world views and disagreements on foundational ideological, philosophical, and religious commitments are the source of contention. He sees the culture wars as being between orthodox and progressive impulses in American culture. "The orthodox and progressivist impulses in American culture, as I have described them, contrast sources of moral truth and also the allegiances by which people, drawn toward one or the other, live and interpret the world. They also express, somewhat imperfectly, the opposing social and political dispositions to which Americans on opposing sides of the cultural divide are drawn."60

Unlike Bennett, Hunter is careful to note the limitations and imperfections of characterizing and identifying "sides" in the culture debates. Having noted these limitations, and offering the appropriate disclaimers and qualifications, Hunter concludes:

Certainly, the associations between foundational moral commitments and social and political agendas is far from absolute; some people and organizations will cross the lines, taking conservative positions on some issues and liberal views on others. Yet the relationship between foundational moral commitments and social and political agendas is too strong and consistent to be viewed as coincidental. This is true for most Americans (as seen in public opinion surveys), but it is especially true for the organizations engaged in the range of contemporary disputes. For the practical purposes of naming the antagonists in the culture war, then, we can label those on one side cultural conservatives or moral traditionalist, and those on the other side liberals or cultural progressives. These are, after all, the terms that the actors in the culture war use to describe themselves. The danger of using these "political" labels, however, is that
one can easily forget that they trace back to prior moral commitments and more basic moral visions. We subtly slip into thinking of the controversies debated as political rather than cultural in nature. On political matters one can compromise: on matters of ultimate moral truth, one cannot.61

In his final sentence, Hunter draws attention to what I take to be one of the chief flaws of Bennett’s account of the culture wars and partisan politics. Namely, Bennett is guilty of conflating politics and matters of ultimate moral truth. As one reviewer of The Book of Virtues put it, Bennett “confuses right and wrong with right and left.”62 Or, as former senator Lowell Weicker charged in his objections to the quest for ideological purity in the Republican party: “The problem with the Republican party is that they don’t look to elect a U.S. senator, they want to elect a pope, in the sense of the purity of what you espouse.”63 I will now include two lengthy quotes from Bennett. In these quotes he describes the liberal mindset which guides Democratic politics, and then contrasts it with his personal conservative beliefs, which he claims are the dominant principles guiding Republican politics. The inaccuracies and misrepresentations of these loaded and tendentious accounts speak for themselves:

From what I have observed, the liberal elite proceed from a certain social and political predisposition. The predisposition tends to be an adopted orientation, not a conclusion based on evidence and argument. When you sift through the arguments, you will often find that modern-day academics and intellectuals (which many elites fancy themselves to be, or long to be) have arrived at their position not, ironically, through intellect, through open-ended, disinterested thinking and inquiry, but through disposition, sentiment, bias, and ideology. Many intellectuals are predisposed to accept certain premises and arguments—a preconceived reality. They search for facts to sustain their political position. The approach is (as philosopher Karl Jaspers said of Marx’s writings) “one of vindication, not investigation.” Serious public debate is therefore a casualty, since they are not likely to change their minds on the basis of compelling empirical arguments. Their starting point is not evidence but ideology. They are undeterred by what Thomas Huxley called “the tragedy of a fact killing a theory. 64

Now, note his account of conservatism:

I started my career in government as a philosophical conservative. Conservatism as I understand it is not essentially theoretical or ideological, but rather a practical matter of experience. It seeks to conserve the best elements of the past. (“What is conservatism?” Lincoln once asked. “Is it not adherence to the old and tried against the new and untried?”) It understands the important role that traditions, institutions, habits and authority have in our social life together, and recognizes many of our national institutions as products of principles developed over time by custom, the lessons of experience, and consensus. Conservatives are interested in pursuing policies that will better reinforce and encourage the
best of our people’s common culture, habits, and beliefs. Conservatism, too, is based on the belief that the social order rests upon a moral base, and that what ties us together as a people—the unum in e pluribus unum—is in constant need of support.65

BENNETT AS PREDAGER

In the remainder of this chapter I will briefly explain why I liken Bennett’s role in politics to the role of a preacher. When I use the term “preacher”, the analogy is used to suggest similarities between the various functions of Bennett’s political rhetoric and the rhetorical functions performed by an evangelical Christian pastor. In my seminary education I was trained to perform these functions. Among the tasks performed by the preacher are teaching, apologetics, evangelization, issuing prophetic indictments of society’s sins, interpreting doctrine, exhorting the faithful to walk in the way of truth and righteousness, and to contend for the faith. My background no doubt fueled my interest in Bennett, and heightened my sensitivities to the similarities between Bennett’s political rhetoric and the rhetoric of the preacher.

Either-Or Choices

The first similarity I would like to note concerns the preacher’s common rhetorical device of presenting his audience with an “either-or” choice. The preacher exhorts us to choose between life or death, salvation or damnation, heaven or hell, sin or righteousness, orthodoxy or heresy, praise or blasphemy, truth or error. A cosmic “Let’s Make a Deal.” Choose door number one and you get the prize. Choose door number two and you get zonked. We see a similar pattern in Bennett’s public speech. He offers the following litany of loaded choices for the American public:

They [Americans] are learning again that the things a society collectively chooses to affirm and condemn, encourage and discourage, make all the difference. This is true whether we are talking about curricular basics or curricular fluff; welfare or workfare; marriage or out-of-wedlock births; regard or disdain for religion in the public square; color blindness or color consciousness; or drug use as acceptable or unacceptable. . . . The American people are renewing their commitment to our common principles.66

This passage from Bennett’s book is strongly reminiscent of the exhortations Moses gave to the Israelites as they prepared to enter Canaan. Moses laid before them the way of obedience to God’s commands and its attendant blessings, and the way of disobedience and its attendant curses (Deuteronomy 30-31). In a similar manner, the
apostle Paul presented the Galatian Christians with the choice of walking in the Spirit or fulfilling the lusts of the flesh: "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: for these are in opposition to one another" (Galatians 5:16-17). In all deference to Moses, Paul, and Bennett, choices in public policy, philosophy, and education, are not as distinct, clear-cut, and manifestly right or wrong as they would have us believe. After all, can sin always be all bad? And if the Devil does exist, he must surely have a few good points and some legitimate grievances. But it is still an open question whether or not the devil is a liberal.

**Explaining Inconsistencies**

A second activity which the preacher engages in is the attempt to explain inconsistencies in doctrine, and the contradictions which sometimes arise when believers attempt to follow the prescriptive dictates of authoritative doctrine. For example, as a student of theology and a novice preacher, I wrestled with the well known paradoxes, antinomies, inconsistencies, and contradictions of Christian doctrine: How can we reconcile predestination with human freedom and responsibility? How can a loving God consign people to everlasting torment? If God is omnipotent and benevolent, then why do we have suffering and evil? One of my favorite doctrinal conundrums concerns two apparently contradictory passages of scripture. In the epistle of James, the author tells us that salvation is by works and not faith. In the epistle to the Ephesians, Paul tells us that salvation is by faith and not by works. There is no telling the number of books, articles, sermons, and commentaries which have been devoted to the task of explaining or resolving this seeming contradiction. The statements are only contradictory, however, in the context of a commitment or belief in an inerrant and infallible Bible. Someone who does not have such a commitment can easily resolve the dilemma; "Maybe James is right, maybe Paul is right, or perhaps they are both wrong." But these are not options for those who are convinced of the inerrancy of scripture, and who believe that there is but one way to salvation. Hence, they devise ingenuous resolutions to what might be termed a "pseudo-problem," which has been created by their categorical adherence to a dubious first principle. Richard Garner comments on such attempts to maintain and defend religious beliefs in the face of contrary evidence: "We know we are going astray when we find ourselves exercising all our ingenuity trying
to preserve the thing we refuse to question. That is not what sensible beings trying to get along in a difficult world do."67

We noted earlier, the contradictions of Ronald Reagan's politics.68 As a loyal supporter of Reagan, and a highly visible leader in the Reagan administration, Bennett was faced with the prospect of having to implement educational policy, and also to give the American public a justificatory account for a political philosophy fraught with contradictions. In his article "Bennett's Attacks on Colleges: What He Is Really Trying to Accomplish," John Phillips argues that Bennett's criticisms of higher education were intended to justify proposed federal budget cuts for education. Cuts which the 99th Congress was reluctant to grant. "His [Bennett's] boss is a master of the media who has scored stunning legislative victories time after time by going 'over the heads' of the Congress and appealing directly to the American public. Mr. Bennett now appears to be taking a page out of the same book, sowing seeds of doubt in the public mind about the quality, the integrity, the morality, and even the legitimacy of American higher education."69

One is at first struck by the incongruity of Bennett's attack on higher education, given that he is himself a product of the academy. However, a closer examination of Bennett's views reveals a man who is committed to the principle that federal spending on defense takes precedence over spending on education. Bennett takes this position in a 1984 interview conducted while he was director of NEH. The interviewer makes the following point:

You seem to shy away from the connection between dollars and ideas. But, as in the case of the summer seminars for high school teachers, we have here identified a good thing... In terms of federal funds, you're the one who has made the point that what we're talking about in terms of funds is a minuscule expenditure. We're talking here about an expenditure far less than the cost of one submarine.70

In his reply, Bennett makes the following claim: "Submarines are a government's first responsibility--defense. That's the government's first and obvious responsibility. A national endowment for the humanities is not a responsibility of government." Bennett's predecessor at the Department of Education, Terrel Bell was not as facile as Bennett in toeing the Party's ideological line. Bell's book The Thirteenth Man, is subtitled, "The story of the struggle between the conscience of an educator and the
ideologues who had chosen him to abolish the Department of Education."71

In the article "Mr. Ed," John Judis gives us what is perhaps the most detailed critical biography of Bennett, and his public service in the Reagan years. Judis dwells at length on the inconsistencies, incongruities, and contradictions of the public policy Bennett was assigned to implement. Judis argues that Bennett's allegiance to Reagan threatened to undermine his philosophical credibility. "By sounding like a publicist rather than a philosopher, Bennett is consuming his own reputation as a moralist and an educator." We have here the ironic case of Dr. Bennett; the putative lover of Aristotle, thoroughly embracing a public policy founded on contradictions.

While at the Department of Education, Bennett faced the task of selling budget cuts rather than increases. In doing so, he alienated many in the department's constituency: teachers, teachers' unions, administrators. "His predecessor, Terrel Bell, dealt with the cuts by trying to mediate between the educational constituencies and the administration. Bennett sought to prove his political loyalty by enthusiastically backing the president's budget cuts and by casting aspersions on anyone who criticizes them."

Judas expands on the contradictions of Bennett's educational policy:

Bennett also has tried to deflect attention from the budget cuts by arguing that money is irrelevant to America's educational ills. Speaking in Austin last February, he said, "The problem with American education is not that it is underfunded. The problem is that it is too often underproductive, overregulated, and underaccountable." This contention has merit in some specific cases, but is directly at odds with the administration's free market values. The tenets of capitalism hold that if teachers are paid less than lawyers, the most intellectually qualified and ambitious people will want to be lawyers rather than teachers.72

Judas also notes the incongruity of Bennett's push for the classics in the humanities--on the one hand--and "the culture of modern capitalism that tended to detract from an appreciation of and interest in classical Greece, biblical Jerusalem, and Elizabethan England. Capitalism encouraged a narrow focus on income and career; it reduced learning to a commodity. But in their passage from left to right, the neoconservatives had largely abandoned this skeptical view, and saw no inconsistency between the Reagan administration's drive for the deregulation of capitalism and a call for a resurgence of humanistic studies. Bennett, who devoted several speeches to urging investment bankers to hire Classics majors, appeared oblivious to any potential contradiction."73 There are similar contradictions in Bennett's attempts to delegitimize.
suppress, and demonize (his monitoring vigilance can not be dignified by the term 'critique') "controversial art," rap music, and television talk shows. These attempts appear to be inconsistent with the reigning Republican economic principles of deregulating commercial activity, and promoting free markets which respond to consumer preferences.

**Fighting the Devil**

As Gary Wills reminds us in his book *Under God*, "a preacher needs a devil."74 In many cases, it seems the devil is the preacher's *raison d'être*. As with many on the Right, Bennett's devil is the 1960s. Stanley Aronowitz begins his essay "Class, Race, and Gender in Educational Politics," with the following: "Running against the 1960s has become nearly a sure-fire prescription for political success in the United States today. Whether the target is drugs, rock music, or the liberal arts curriculum in public schools, the new wisdom, sometimes called the 'new puritanism,' seems to accord with everyday life, which is experienced by many as tougher, more competitive, and more dangerous."75 Bennett offers us a romanticized account of the past. Even if America had at times failed to live up to its stated ideals, Bennett argues, at least its institutions were grounded in traditional beliefs and the mores of a common culture. Bennett claims that these shared national values included the Judeo-Christian ethic, the democratic ethic, and the work ethic.76

Into this veritable Eden—to extend the biblical metaphor—came the serpent, in the form of permissive attitudes toward sex and drugs, values clarification, relativistic views of culture and morality, relaxed curricular standards, governmental programs to fight poverty, a "soft" attitude toward criminals, affirmative action, and the divisive intrusion of the claims of marginal groups in the discourse on public policy. For nearly every social and educational issue Bennett examines, he cites the locus of current problems in the liberal philosophy and policies of the 1960s. Just as the Devil functions as an explanatory device in biblical cosmology, so does the social and educational policy of the 1960s function in Bennett's rhetoric.

Perhaps the most clear example of this scenario is Bennett's book *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators*. In this work, Bennett offers "facts and figures," which he contends demonstrate the widespread pathologies which are threatening to destroy American society. Bennett identifies the source of these problems in the misguided
policies and ideas of the 1960s. And, as the preacher is wont to do, Bennett warns of a cataclysm of cosmic proportions unless the works of the devil are undone: “Over the past three decades we have experienced substantial social regression. Today the forces of social decomposition are challenging—and in some instances, overtaking—the forces of social composition. And when decomposition takes hold, it exacts an enormous human cost. Unless these exploding social pathologies are reversed, they will lead to the decline and perhaps even to the fall of the American republic.”

This line of argumentation is the same as I have heard in numerous sermons. For example, it is a common theme of many sermons by fundamentalist Christian preachers to cite the Supreme Court’s ruling to ban prayer in public schools as the cause of all our educational woes. Typical in these sermons is the following argument: “In 1963 the Supreme Court banned prayer from the public schools. Today we have increased teen pregnancies, drug abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, falling SAT scores, and rampant violence in the schools. When you take God out of the classroom, this is what you get!” Few, however, outside of the true believers who sit in the pews and tune in on the airwaves, are impressed by such arguments. It is no coincidence, though, that the simplistic explanatory narrative offered by Bennett has found a sympathetic audience in fundamentalist Christian circles.

While Bennett’s arguments may be slightly more sophisticated than those offered by Christians, they suffer from some of the same flaws. Bennett fails in his attempt to demonstrate that the liberal elite were the sole architects of the social and educational policy in the 1960s. He fails to note that many of the social policies initiated in the 1960s resulted in increased opportunity and social mobility for women, minorities, and the poor. Finally, his argument that the policy of the 1960s caused our current social and educational problems carelessly omits the consideration of other—and I believe more compelling—explanations. Explanations grounded in economic, sociological, and demographic research.

**Exhortations, Admonitions, and Warnings**

One final way in which Bennett plays the role of the preacher is in his rhetorical style. His speeches and writing are replete with exhortations, admonitions, and warnings. Bennett lacks no confidence in his proclamations about what we should read, and how we should behave (the subjects of the next two chapters). It is because of
this style of rhetoric that David Frum calls Bennett a “preacher.” Frum cites a lengthy passage from an interview he conducted with Bennett, to illustrate this point:

We have done this to ourselves. I mean, there’s bad stuff emanating from Hollywood, from intellectuals and from books, and from movies and from TV, but people have bought into it, which is the problem. You can rail against the cultural elite all you like, which I do, and I think they have a lot to answer for. But it’s a free country. People don’t have to listen to it if they don’t want to. People do listen to it. . . . I think that . . . we cannot as conservatives fall into the same trap the liberals fall into, which is to say to the American people, you too are victims: it’s not your fault; this was done to you. Things were put forward and argued and suggested, but people bought into them. Teachers bought into values clarification, and so did parents; people bought into the notion that you don’t have to spend quantity time with your kids, just quality time. People let their kids watch too much TV. People don’t check homework. . . . The political imperative is to not only criticize the cultural elite, the liberal elite, but to say to the American people, “Cut it out.”

Bennett’s homily is reminiscent of the words and attitude of the Pharisee in the biblical parable, who self-righteously beat his breast and stated, “Thank God I am not like other men” (Luke 18:9-14). As Frum comments on Bennett’s oratory, “The fear of saying ‘cut it out’ was to blame for so many of America’s social problems. If disorderly, often crazy, often dangerous vagrants thronged the most elegant streets of America’s cities in the 1980s, the blame—the moralist conservatives argued—belonged to a society that had lost the self-confidence to proscribe intolerable behavior.”

**SUMMARY**

I will now summarize the major findings of this chapter. We began with a description of Bennett’s depiction of the culture wars. Bennett contends that the cultural conflicts involve a struggle over the principles, ideas, sentiments, and attitudes which he believes serve to animate, inform, and assess cultural expression and public policy. The conflicts, according to Bennett, are between liberal elites and mainstream Americans. He also distinguishes the “two camps” in the culture wars in terms of their partisan voting patterns in national elections (Democrats vs. Republicans); and in terms of each side’s philosophical-political orientation (liberals vs. conservatives). We then examined each of these characterizations of the competing factions.

I concluded that Bennett’s depiction of the “liberal elite” involves terminology and claims which are misleading and inaccurate in describing the political and cultural conflicts. Bennett is positing a dubious and tendentious dichotomy between the liberal
elite and mainstream America. Bennett uses 'liberal elite' in a pejorative sense, and the term is one which is not self-ascriptive. Bennett's use of the term also serves to obfuscate the role of powerful conservatives in the culture war, which Hunter argues is in actuality a conflict between elites. Bennett's lack of philosophical rigor and intellectual credibility in his portrayal of the culture wars is typical of his public discourse, as many critics have pointed out.

I then offered an analysis of the war metaphor in Bennett's discourse. The metaphor underlies many of Bennett's normative claims. It serves as a guide and a gauge for his rhetoric and his policy. I concluded that the reliance on the war metaphor has proven to promote polarization, animosity, and a tragic and unnecessary deterioration of dialogue on these important issues. I suggested the consideration and utilization of alternative metaphors which might be more conducive to dialogue, sharing, and understanding.

I then engaged in an examination of partisan politics and the culture war. I discussed the Republican's electoral coalition of economic and cultural conservatives which reached its zenith in the Reagan era. It was also during this time that Bennett's political career took shape. Bennett was one of a number of neoconservative intellectuals who zealously pursued the task of offering a philosophical defense of conservative beliefs and policy. This activity on the part of conservatives has been called a quest for a "national popular will," or a "hegemonic accord."

I used the term "creedal politics" to refer to the politics of Bennett and his fellow conservatives. By "creedal politics" I am referring to Bennett's commitment to first principles, and to the proposition that ideas and intellectual commitments are of ultimate importance in directing and assessing public policy. I argue that in doing so, Bennett is guilty of conflating politics and matters of ultimate moral truth. Or, as one critic put it, Bennett confuses "right and wrong with right and left."

I closed the chapter by arguing that Bennett's role in creedal politics bears important similarities to the role of an evangelical preacher. These similarities included Bennett's work as an apologist and evangelist, defending and proclaiming the principal tenets of Conservatism. As does the preacher, Bennett presents the options for public and educational policy in terms of strict "either-or" choices. Bennett has also taken on the task of resolving and explaining any contradictions, inconsistencies, and incongruities of conservatism, much like a preacher explains discrepancies in doctrine.
A third similarity involves the positing of a "Devil" in Bennett's rhetoric. For nearly every social and educational issue Bennett examines, he cites the locus of current problems in the liberal philosophy and policies of the 1960s. Just as the Devil functions as an explanatory device in biblical cosmology, so does the social and educational policy of the 1960s function in Bennett's rhetoric. A final way in which Bennett's public speech is similar to that of a preacher is in his rhetorical style. Particularly his reliance on exhortations, admonitions, and warnings. I also offered criticisms of Bennett's role as a preacher of creedal politics.
CHAPTER NOTES

1. Bennett, De-Valuing, p. 25.

2. Bennett, De-Valuing, p. 38.


5. I am not arguing for a strict distinction between theory and practice. After all, “theory can be practical if you know how to use it.” Thus, critical tools and approaches associated with “both ways of looking at things” seem appropriate and applicable to the assessment and understanding of Bennett’s claims.


13. See, for example: Richard Hofstadter, Anti-Intellectualism in American Life (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963). E.J. Dionne has written: “Nowhere is mistrust of elites more widespread than it is in the United States, so having an elite as an enemy is an enormous political asset.” E. J. Dionne, Jr., Why Americans Hate Politics (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), pp. 63-64.


17. In the article “The Quixotic Quest For Civility,” the authors attempt to assess the prospects for converting the “reciprocated diatribe” between the Religious


19. This talk of pronouns reminds me of Bertrand Russell's "subjective conjugations," and also sayings such as "It is a recession when your neighbor is out of work, and it is a depression when you are out of work." For a critical and moving account of how the use of personal pronouns (and their concomitant affective stances) can "play out" in educational policy and discourse, see the chapter "Other People's Children." in: Jonathan Kozol, Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools (New York: Crown Publishers, 1991), pp. 40-82. See also, "First Person," in: Jonathan Kozol, The Night Is Dark and I Am Far From Home, revised edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), pp. 108-18.


24. Hunter, Culture Wars, p. 60.


29. In their analysis of educational concepts (e.g. 'indoctrination'), philosophers of education must provide not only a descriptive account of what constitutes indoctrination, but also a justificatory account of what is objectionable about indoctrination. See, for example: John H. Chambers, The Achievement of Education: An Examination of Key Concepts in Educational Practice (Lanham: University of America Press, 1983), pp. 34-46.

30. It has been convincingly argued that powerful, influential, and well funded conservatives are largely responsible for publicizing and propagating the myth of a "political correctness movement." See, for example: Sara Diamond, "Managing the Anti-PC Industry"; Ellen Messer-Davidow, "Manufacturing the Attack on Liberalized Higher Education"; Joan Wallach Scott, "The Campaign Against Political Correctness: What's
Really at Stake": all in: After Political Correctness: The Humanities and Society in the

John K. Wilson writes: "The fact that conservatives' attack on political
correctness have been well funded and carefully organized in no way refutes their ideas.
Nor is there any conspiracy here. But the large amount of money given to conservative
organizations to promote the attack on higher education helps explain why there have
been so many books and publications devoted to "exposing" political correctness and so
little response from the other side. The myth of political correctness has been sustained
not by a careful examination of the evidence but by the fact that large amounts of
money and support are available to only one side in the culture wars." John K. Wilson,
The Myth of Political Correctness: The Conservative Attack on Higher Education

31. Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote that philosophy is "a battle against bewitchment
of our intelligence by means of language." Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical
novel Lila, Robert Pirsig illustrates the danger and absurdity of becoming too "attached"
to constructed categories, with his account of the "paradox of the platypus." Pirsig
writes: "Early zoologists classified as mammals those that suckle their young and as
reptiles those that lay eggs. Then a duck-billed platypus was discovered in Australia
laying eggs like a perfect reptile and then, when they hatched, suckling the infant platypi
like a perfect mammal. The discovery created quite a sensation. What an enigma! It was
exclaimed. What a mystery! What a marvel of nature! . . . Even today you still see
occasional articles in nature magazines asking, 'Why does this paradox of nature exist?'
The answer is: it doesn't. The platypus isn't doing anything paradoxical at all. It isn't
having any problems. Platypi have been laying eggs and suckling their young for
millions of years before there were any zoologists to come along and declare it illegal.
The real mystery, the real enigma, is how mature, objective, trained scientific observers
can blame their own goof on a poor innocent platypus." Robert M. Pirsig, Lila: An

In his book Beyond The Chains of Illusion: My Encounter with Marx and Freud
(New York: Trident Press, 1962), Erich Fromm discusses Marx and Freud's driving
concern to transcend the bonds and illusions of language and societal convention. I
recently saw the play "Angels in America." One scene in the play powerfully portrays the
societal, psychological, and political freight that language and labels can carry. The
character Roy Cohn will not allow his doctor to diagnose him as having AIDS or label
him as a "homosexual," because that is a term which functions to assign one an inferior
hierarchical status on "the food chain." Thus Cohn concludes, "I fuck men, but don't
call me a homosexual. I don't have AIDS. I have liver cancer." Tony Kushner, "Angels in

34. Bennett, The De-Valuing, p. 258.
35. Quoted in Bennett, Our Children, p. 19.
36. Goldwater's words in this 1964 campaign speech were: "I would remind you
that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And let me remind you that
moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue." Quoted by Dionne, Why Americans
Hate Politics, p. 179.
37. Cornel M. Hamm, Philosophical Issues in Education: An Introduction
38. Bennett, De-Valuing, p. 27.


44. Apple, Official Knowledge, p. 4.

45. Dionne, Why Americans Hate Politics, p. 257.


49. Frum, Dead Right, p. 106.


51. Dionne, Why Americans Hate Politics, p. 73.


53. Dionne, Why Americans Hate Politics, p. 73.

54. Diamond, Roads to Dominion, p. 309.


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56. Bennett, De-Valuing, p. 22. For a discussion of Bennett's and Kristol's involvement with these conservative organizations, see: Ellen Messer-Davidow, "The Attack on Liberalized Higher Education."


60. Hunter, Culture Wars, p. 46.

61. Hunter, Culture Wars, p. 46.


64. Bennett, De-Valuing, p. 27.

65. Bennett, De-Valuing, p. 35.


68. Social critic Walter Truett Anderson calls Ronald Reagan “the first postmodern politician.” Anderson writes of Reagan: “It is profoundly ironic, a piece of history to make a deconstructionist’s mouth water, that Ronald Reagan, who came to political power as a representative of a popular urge toward the restoration of old and understandable American values, did so by campaigning with the most sophisticated media techniques, so skillfully used as to make his opponent’s campaign look like a creaking Model-T by comparison. As Reagan went on to the presidency, many political observers noted other paradoxes, commented on how strange it was that a twice-married movie star, a longtime resident of the closest thing around to a modern Babylon, could somehow emerge as the incarnation of the clean-cut simple values of small-town America.” Walter Truett Anderson, Reality Isn’t What It Used to Be (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), pp. 164-65.

69. John Phillips, “Bennett’s attacks on colleges: What is he really trying to accomplish?,” The Chronicle of Higher Education 33 (Oct. 29, 1986): 44-45. John K. Wilson makes a similar point concerning the economics of the conservative attacks on political correctness and higher education: “While the political correctness ‘debates’ raged, many people never realized how deeply federal and state governments were cutting student aid and university funding, reducing educational opportunities for disadvantaged Americans. Political correctness has played a significant role in the ease with which conservatives have pushed through the defunding of higher education. It is no small irony to discover that the conservatives’ attack on higher education, done in the name of preserving the university from destruction by the barbarians within, has turned out to be the most powerful movement promoting the budget cuts that are imperiling academic standards and access to college for thousands of students.” Wilson, Myth of PC, p. 163.


75. Aronowitz, Postmodern Education, p. 3.

76. Bennett, Our Children, p. 167.

77. Bennett, The Index, p. 8.


79. Frum, Dead Right, p. 107.

80. Frum, Dead Right, p. 107.
CHAPTER III
CULTURE AND THE CURRICULUM

INTRODUCTION

One of the dominant themes in Bennett’s writings is his insistence that the humanities curriculum in secondary schools and colleges should feature at its core, the great works of Western civilization. Bennett contends that the curriculum should function to transmit the common culture of the West, and to preserve our cultural heritage. Bennett is of the opinion that in many schools the curriculum no longer functions in this way. Therefore we are in danger of losing our cultural moorings, failing to maintain our cultural identity, and depriving students of a knowledge of the great works of Western culture which Bennett claims are the intellectual building blocks of our common cultural heritage. In this chapter, I will first set forth Bennett’s major claims on this matter. I will then set forth Bennett’s justifications for these claims, and offer some comments on them. Finally, I will examine some of the criticisms which have been made of Bennett’s positions on culture and the curriculum.

BENNETT’S CLAIMS FOR WESTERN CULTURE

There are many instances in Bennett’s writings in which he makes claims for the primacy and centrality of the study of Western culture in the curriculum. The following example from the report “To Reclaim a Legacy,” is typical:

The core of the American college curriculum--its heart and soul--should be the civilization of the West, source of the most powerful and pervasive influences on America and all of its people. It is simply not possible for students to understand their society without studying its intellectual legacy. If their past is hidden from them, they will become aliens in their own culture, strangers in their own land.¹

Thus, Bennett claims that the curriculum should have at its core an emphasis on content (the great works and ideas of Western civilization) rather than on skills (critical thinking, writing, reading). He writes, “Good teaching does more than teach skills. Skills are important, but knowledge is at least as important, and knowledge can
come only from content." Bennett contends that in the 1960s and 1970s there was a "collective loss of nerve and faith on the part of both faculty and academic administrators," as to the primacy of a core curriculum based on a specific content. According to Bennett, this turn of events constituted a relinquishing of the intellectual authority of the traditional curriculum. Educators had given in to the demands of students, educational fads, and political interests. "With intellectual authority relinquished, we found that we did not need to worry about what was worth knowing, worth defending, worth believing. The curriculum was no longer a statement about what knowledge mattered; instead, it became the product of a political compromise among competing schools and departments overlaid by marketing considerations."

Bennett comments further on these curricular changes:

Intellectual authority came to be replaced by intellectual relativism as a guiding principle of the curriculum. Because colleges and universities believed they no longer could or should assert the primacy of one fact or one book over another, all knowledge came to be seen as relative in importance, relative to consumer or faculty interest. This loss was accompanied by a shift in language. The desired ends of education changed from knowledge to "inquiry," from content to "skills." We began to see colleges listing their objectives as teaching such skills as reading, critical thinking, and awareness of other points of view. These are undeniably essential ends to a college education, but they are not sufficient. One study group member said, "What good is knowing how to write if you are ignorant of the finest examples of the language?" Failure to address content allows colleges and universities to beg the question of what an educated man or woman in the 1980s needs to know.

We see, then, that Bennett does not view the prescribed emphasis on content as being at the expense of skills. Rather, knowledge of a prescribed body of content is seen as a prerequisite for the full exercise of one's critical faculties. Bennett claims that a mastery of a certain content is needed if one is to be considered an educated person. This needs statement functions in at least two ways. In one sense it functions to inform us about the definition of 'an educated person'. In this case, having knowledge of a certain body of content is a logical or conceptual necessity for one to be deemed 'educated'. Of course, this definition is not uncontroversial. Bennett needs to provide an argument to justify his application of 'education', and its attendant evaluative freight.

This leads us to the recognition that the claim also functions--in part--as a value judgment. Philosophers of education have noted that needs statements have a three part structure which includes an empirical observation, an empirical prediction,
and a value judgment. Needs are always for something else. Needs are “in order to.”

We “need something” in order to attain a goal, achieve an ideal, meet a standard, or satisfy some desired outcome. For example, if we say that “Mary needs glasses,” we mean that she needs them in order to see better. This needs statement involves an empirical observation (Mary has been tested and found to be nearsighted), an empirical prediction (glasses will correct Mary’s vision), and a value judgment (Mary is better off with improved vision).

Now, let us take a closer look at Bennett’s claim that “an educated person needs to know X.” This claim functions—in part—as a value judgment, asserting that an educated person needs to know X in order to function effectively in her culture. This is the very claim argued for by E.D. Hirsch in his book Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know. Both Hirsch and Bennett argue that students need to acquire, and teachers need to transmit, specific cultural information (content) in order for the students to become educated, and for the teachers to be educating. Hirsch complains that many present-day teachers “have not shown an adequate appreciation of the need for transmission of specific cultural information.” And he offers this corrective: “Only by accumulating shared symbols, and the shared information that the symbols represent, can we learn to communicate effectively with one another in our national community.”

I will offer some criticisms of these views, shortly. For now, I am attempting to call attention the idea of content which is so central to Bennett’s views on culture and the curriculum. Hirsch offers us a thorough account of what culturally literate Americans need to know. Bennett, who has championed Hirsch’s views on cultural literacy, often lists and identifies the specific content that students need to know. Let us now look at some of Bennett’s claims on the content of the content in his prescribed curriculum.

The Common Culture

Bennett argues that teachers and educators have the responsibility of “preserving and transmitting to each new generation what may be called our ‘common culture,’ the things that bind Americans together as one people. In its highest form, this common culture is the sum of our intellectual and spiritual inheritance, our legacy from all the
ages that have gone before us. It is the knowledge, ideas, and aspirations that shape our understanding of who we are as a people and what we are capable of." He then lists several of the elements that make up the common culture:

They are documents like the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. They are certain principles, like the right to free speech and a belief that all men are created equal. They are the stories of certain individuals whose vision inspired a nation--towering figures like George Washington and Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr. They are events from our past that have shaped who we are, such as the landing of the Mayflower, the Boston Tea Party, the surrender at Appomattox, the landing of Normandy. Our common culture also consists of great books that give the highest kind of expression to the way we find ourselves in the world, ageless works like the Odyssey and Macbeth and Huckleberry Finn. He claims that "these are a few of the great milestones and achievements of our culture, and we should want all our children to know about them." At another point, Bennett argues for "providing our students with a foundation of shared knowledge; and the need for schools to transmit social and political values." Bennett elaborates on the suggested political values in the essay, "America, the World, and Our Schools." In this piece, Bennett contends that American students are, for the most part, ignorant of the political principles and values that have shaped our nation's history. As a result of this ignorance, students have no moral or intellectual foundation from which to make judgments on political issues. In this case, Bennett maintains, students are not able to arrive at the judgment that some forms of government are better that others. Bennett asks, "How well do Americans understand the fundamental character of international politics today--that our republican government stands for certain things in the world, and that other regimes stand against us?" He then elaborates on the political values which need to be taught in schools:

Do they understand that the United States represents something more than the interests of a big power in global competition? That our international posture embodies our founding principles? That we stand as a free, self-governing society in defense of those ideas which together make for freedom and self-government? Respect for the individual. Religious freedom. The rule of law. Limited government. Private property. The freely given, uncoerced consent of the governed. Rights to dissent: freedoms of speech, press, association, and assembly. Majority rule. And do they understand that these ideas are not shared universally, throughout the world? That in some places only lip service is paid to them; that they are honored in words, dishonored in practice?

There are many additional instances in which Bennett lists texts, principles,
values, and events which he contends constitute the foundational content which should be at the core of the curriculum. According to Bennett, "a true core curriculum is a set of fundamental courses, ordered, purposive, coherent." A curriculum which has as its core the "ideas which ultimately move society--ideas contained in the great works of Western civilization, ideas encountered through education." In his report, "James Madison High School," Bennett offers us a model of such a core curriculum at the secondary level. In "To Reclaim a Legacy," he offers several suggestions on how such a core curriculum might be achieved in undergraduate education. As we noted earlier, Bennett contends that his emphasis on content in the curriculum is not done at the expense of developing such skills as critical thinking, reading, and writing. Rather, he agrees with Hirsch, that possessing a knowledge of basic cultural information is a prerequisite for exercising these skills, and for one to exercise informed judgment as a functioning citizen in a democracy.

In a similar vein, Bennett is careful to note that his arguments for a core humanities curriculum based on the works and values of Western culture should not be viewed as an endorsement of a rigid canon of specific works, nor should his proposed curriculum be viewed as excluding the study of other cultures. For example, he suggests that the undergraduate curriculum should cultivate a "familiarity with the history, literature, religion, and philosophy of at least one non-Western culture or civilization. We think it better to have a deeper understanding of a single non-Western culture than a superficial taste of many." In regard to the study of other cultures, Bennett argues that an understanding of one's own culture is a necessary prerequisite for such study. He writes, "But in studying other cultures it is best to begin with a thorough knowledge of our own: knowledge of one's own civilization provides a platform from which to view others." He makes the following claims concerning the relation of the curriculum to our culturally diverse society:

The solution is not a return to an earlier time when the classical curriculum was the only curriculum and college was available to only a privileged few. American higher education today serves far more people and many more purposes than it did a century ago. Its increased accessibility to women, racial and ethnic minorities, recent immigrants, and students of limited means is a positive accomplishment of which our nation is rightly proud. As higher education broadened, the curriculum became more sensitive to the long-overlooked cultural achievements of many groups, what Janice Harris of the University of Wyoming referred to as "a
respect for diversity." This too is a good thing. But our eagerness to assert
the virtues of pluralism should not allow us to sacrifice the principle that
formerly lent substance and continuity to the curriculum, namely that
each college and university should recognize and accept its vital role as
conveyor of the accumulated wisdom of our civilization.17

I have thus far attempted to set forth some of Bennett's claims concerning the
importance of content in the curriculum, and also his claims for the specific content he
advocates. In regard to the method of instruction, the dominant metaphor for Bennett
is that of "transmission," or "conveyance."18 Information about our intellectual, moral,
and political traditions is to be transmitted or conveyed to students. This is not to say
that Bennett portrays learning as being a passive enterprise. Nor is it to say that
Bennett does not recognize the difference a talented, informed, and creative teacher can
make in the facilitation of the desired transmission of knowledge. The "transmission"
metaphor is, however, pervasive in Bennett's rhetoric, and it is the dominant metaphor
in his discussions of how the core content of the curriculum is to be taught. This leads
us to a consideration of the form and purpose of assessment in Bennett's curriculum.

**Assessment of Curricular Goals**

The following question might be asked of Bennett: If we grant your position on
the nature of education in the humanities--namely, that education consists of the
transmission of the foundational intellectual tenets of our common Western culture--
then how are we to assess the success of the program and the educational development
of students? For Bennett, *standards* are paramount in the program of assessment.
Bennett believes in standards. He takes them seriously; both as existing in a grand
Platonic sense, and in an immediate sense as they are instantiated in educational and
social policy. He believes that there do *exist* universal transcendent standards, such as
*truth, beauty, excellence, the best, what deserves to be valued, equality, morality, right and
wrong*, and so on. To deny that such standards exist or to deny their binding
prescriptivity is, according to Bennett, tantamount to relativism. And in Bennett's
accounts, the relativist is one who has abandoned her epistemic grounding and is
therefore incapable of making normative judgments in matters of morality, art, literature,
curriculum, or philosophical principle. Bennett is committed to these standards, and he
applies them to his arguments for the curriculum.

This commitment has often taken form in Bennett's calls for the institution and
application of national standards to the curriculum and to student assessment. For
example, he argues that "in order to restore the place of history in our schools, specific curricular standards should be set by experts, and these should be carefully adhered to." 19 Of course, for Bennett, commitment to the application of these standards would involve developing a curriculum which has at its heart the best works of the best culture, namely, "our common culture." In the introduction to "James Madison High School, Bennett applauds recent gains made by the various states in implementing curricular reforms which involve a more rigorous core content and also the growing implementation of proficiency tests which are aimed at assessing students' knowledge of basic content.

Thus far, I have attempted to set forth some of Bennett's claims for the curriculum. The claims I set forth can be briefly summarized as follows. He claims the curriculum needs to emphasize content. He claims the content of the content should consist of the best ideas and works from our common cultural tradition. He views the basic mission of the teacher and the school, to be the transmission of the intellectual tenets of the common culture to students. Finally, the curriculum is to be assessed by how well it transmits this core content, one important measure of which is student performance on content based proficiency exams. Let us now turn to some of the justifications Bennett offers for these proposals.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE CLAIMS FOR WESTERN CULTURE

In his essay "Why Western Civilization?," Bennett offers three lines of argument to justify the primacy of Western culture in the humanities curriculum. First, he argues that "we must study the West because it is ours." Secondly, he argues that "we must study, value, and defend Western civilization because it is good." And finally he argues that "we must study, value, and defend the West is because the West is under attack." I am going to quote Bennett at length here in order for us to examine the first of these three arguments.

First, we must study the West because it is ours. It is the culture in which we live and in which most of us will continue to live: it is the water, and we are the fish. We live in a society governed by precepts that are products of Western civilization, and that bear witness to its moral development. The institutions that inform our conduct as a people--our schools and universities, our churches and synagogues, our communities and governments and even our notions of friendship and family--acquired their shape through the course of Western history. The ideals and beliefs that bind us as a people--belief in human rights, the dignity of man, the
inviolability of conscience—first gained currency at particular times in Western history. To understand our society, our institutions, our ways, and our contemporary controversies, we need to understand our political, social, and intellectual history. We need to know the story of Western civilization, for that is where our institutions and society were made.20

At this point in the argument, Bennett again makes the disclaimer that the priority given Western culture should not be thought to preclude the study of other cultures. Bennett maintains that we have much to learn from other cultures and civilizations, and that they are therefore worthy of our study. But he claims such study is only fruitful when students first have a strong working knowledge of their own culture, which provides them with a foundational intellectual and cultural “platform from which to view others.” According to Bennett, calls for a multicultural emphasis in the curriculum often involve a watered down approach which offers students only a superficial knowledge of a smattering of diverse cultures. He writes, “Our students should study other cultures, and study them in greater depth than many now do. And to understand another culture requires more than a quick, often patronizing “bus tour of the Third World.”21

In his second line of justification, Bennett argues that Western civilization is “good,” and therefore warrants not only our study, but also our endorsement and defense:

The second reason we must study, value, and defend Western civilization is because it is good. It is not all good. There are certainly great blots on its record. In the story of the West there are injustices—catalogs of sins and errors. Nevertheless, the West has produced the world’s most just and effective system of government: the system of representative democracy. In the story of inhumanity and misery that is history, in the totality of its acts, the Western achievement stands high. The story of the West is the most hopeful story.22

In this argument, Bennett is claiming that by applying some grand calculus to history, he is able to conclude that the West “stands high.” Bennett seems to be operating from a “final judgment” metaphor in making this assessment. More will be said about Bennett’s use of this metaphor in the following section. For now, let it be noted, that part of Bennett’s justification for his claim that the West is good, involves assigning to the West the preeminent position on a hierarchical ranking of civilizations, cultures, and forms of government. The West is good because, after tabulating the respective contributions of all previous societies we can reasonably conclude—Bennett
claims—that the West stands above the rest. Bennett shows no hesitancy in applying superlatives to the West. The West has "produced the world's most just and effective system of government": It is the "world's greatest," "the best the world has seen," "the most hopeful story." Bennett quotes Allan Bloom, who comments on America's position as the crowning glory of the Western tradition: "America tells one story: the unbroken ineluctable progress of freedom and equality."

Bennett then expands on his argument for the goodness of the West by appealing to a comparison of current forms of government. He claims that "not all systems of government are equal. Some forms of government are better than others; some are more just, less oppressive, more open, less resistant to needed reforms." As the prime example of a system of government which "flouts the highest ideals achieved in Western thought," he cites the Soviet Union. This portion of Bennett's argument, then, goes something like this: Current governments can be viewed as the products of commitments to foundational philosophical principles and political traditions. The United States is a nation founded on a commitment to the best principles of the West, and the Soviet Union is [was-1987] a nation based on principles antithetical to the West. Any reasonable person would have to judge the quality of life in the United States to be superior to life in the Soviet Union. And since these respective governments are the products of a particular political and philosophical tradition, an endorsement of life in the United States implies an endorsement of the West. Thus, the West can be judged as good, or even the best, because the quality of life enjoyed by its citizens is better than that experienced by those living under governments founded on alternative philosophical commitments. To bolster this claim, he cites a study which ranked the nations of the world according to the quality of life provided their people. "Of the countries listed in the top ten, all but one were in the West. The one Eastern nation--Japan--was, like the nine from the West, a democratic republic." According to Bennett, the success of the West, and its way of life and government, have served as an inspiration and a model for others to learn from and follow. He writes: "And the brightest beacon to that way of life has been the U.S. Constitution, the most imitated political document in the world. In the fifth century B.C., Pericles could say that Athens was the education of Hellas; in our day, it is the West--the United States especially--to which much of the world looks for guidance, hope, and inspiration."
Thus, Bennett argues that the “Western political order is the best the world has seen.” He then goes on to argue that “so too is its philosophical tradition.” In support of this claim, Bennett maintains that the great books of the West offer an “unparalleled resource” from which we might find answers to life’s great philosophical questions. “For every person who seeks serious answers to such questions as What can I know? What should I do? What should I hope for? What is man? What is good?—indeed to the very question How should I live?—there is no better place to look for guidance than the great books and deeds of the Western tradition. Otherwise, we answer these questions in a void, ignorant of the most thoughtful presentations of fundamental alternatives.”

Bennett claims that the great books of the West contain the best presentations of these fundamental differences. He contends that “while the questions that the great books pose are fundamental, the answers that they provide are unpredictable. The great books are in fact a great conversation, in which the conclusions are not fixed beforehand.” Bennett argues that the Western philosophical tradition distinguishes itself because it has engaged in dialogue, self-examination, and correction. Hence, the Western tradition is good because it has embodied reason and rational discourse. Therefore it is worthy of our study:

The case for the study of the liberal arts is not, then, a case for ideology; it is a case for philosophy and for thoughtfulness. Those who take such studies seriously live very different lives and come to very different conclusions about particulars. The tenets of Western civilization are not etched in stone; the West is the most self-critical of cultures. Reason is exalted, and reason leads to a look, a second look, and where necessary, readjustment, redefinition, and change.25

Allow me now, to summarize Bennett’s arguments for his proposition that the West is good, and should therefore be studied, valued, and defended. According to Bennett, the historical achievements of the Western tradition can be judged to be better than the achievements of other cultures and traditions. Hence it is “good” because it is better than the rest. Governments grounded in Western principles produce better living conditions for their citizens. Hence it is “good” in consequentialist terms. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then the West, and particularly the United States, has been the recipient of lavish praise from those who have looked to the West for guidance and inspiration. Hence it is “good” in the eyes of others—the Western “wannabes.” The philosophical tradition of the West is good because it contains the most thoughtful answers to life’s grand questions, and because the Western philosophical tradition is
the epitome of reason and rational discourse.

This brings us to Bennett's third justification for the preeminence of Western culture in the curriculum:

The third reason we must study, value, and defend the West is because the West is under attack. It is under attack from those who declare themselves hostile to Western progress, Western principles and, in some cases, Western religions. This attack comes from without, of course, but also from within. It comes from those so taken in by relativism that they doubt the preferability of civilization to savagery, of democracy to totalitarianism. Theirs is not an America that, despite its imperfections, its weaknesses, its sins, has served as a beacon to the world; instead, theirs is an America corrupt with a host of unholy "isms," such as racism, elitism, and imperialism.26

Here, Bennett is again turning his charges toward the liberal elite. Those liberal intellectuals and academics whose nefarious relativism, if allowed to go unchecked, and if not defended against, poses a threat to our common culture and civilization. According to Bennett, the authority, and perhaps the very existence of Western culture is at stake. One of the criticisms of the West which Bennett discusses, at this point in the essay, is the charge that Western culture is sexist.

Bennett's defense against this charge is typical and predictable. In fact, it is the same defense he often employs against charges of racism. Bennett acknowledges that women have historically been the victims of injustices, and that in the United States they did not always enjoy the rights and political freedoms granted to men. He argues, however, that American women of today do enjoy an unrivaled degree of freedom. He writes, "It may be said that what we consider today the rights of mankind were first the rights of men; the rights proclaimed two hundred years ago in this country have only in this century been fully accorded to women. But today, they are indeed the rights of both men and women. As citizens, women enjoy all the privileges and freedoms of democratic citizenship; they enjoy the right to vote, to speak, to worship, and to associate freely."27

According to Bennett, these foundational political principles, which were drafted by the Founding Fathers, and to which activists for women's rights appealed (e.g. "The Declaration of Sentiments," issued by the first Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848),28 enabled women to achieve full enjoyment of political rights.

Just as the West has the best political and philosophical tradition, so--according to Bennett--it is Western culture which has provided the best treatment of women:
But I ask: On balance, is there another culture that has been better for women? To be sure, men and women have not been treated equally throughout our past. Yes, grant the injustices of earlier times. Grant the injustices of our day. But grant as well that in America today, women enjoy more liberty, more opportunity than they ever have before. And grant that women in the West are far better off than women anywhere else in the world.\textsuperscript{29}

So Bennett defends the West, and he encourages all Americans to do likewise:

If it can be said that today there is one objective to which all Americans should adhere, I believe that it is the defense of the West and the extension of its principles. To those who are most concerned with justice, with equality, with human dignity, there can be no greater cause. The places today where the rights of women are most threatened are the places where the rights of all people are systematically denied. The nations, in short, where the ideas developed over 2,500 years in the West have failed to prevail. For all of us, for women as for men, these ideas, these Western ideas, remain still the last, best hope on earth.\textsuperscript{30}

\textbf{COMMENTS AND CRITICISMS}

For the remainder of the chapter, I will discuss some criticisms which have been made of Bennett’s arguments for the curriculum. These critical comments will involve the following issues: First, we will examine Bennett’s views on the role and status of \textit{content} in the curriculum. Particularly, I will assess Bennett’s and Hirsch’s arguments for a curriculum which emphasizes a general knowledge of a specified core content. Second, we will examine Bennett’s arguments for the specific content of the content. Specifically, I will assess the three arguments he employs to justify the primacy of Western culture in the curriculum. To refresh our memory, he argues that we should study the West because it is our culture; We should study and value the West because it is good; And we should study, value, and defend the West because it is under attack. In my examination of these arguments, I will give special attention to Bennett’s metaphoric positioning for his claim that Western culture is the best. I will argue that he is operating from what I call “a final judgment” metaphor. A metaphor which, I will argue, has some serious weaknesses. I will also offer some criticisms of Bennett’s arguments against relativism.

\textbf{CONTENT AND THE CURRICULUM}

To the reader who is not familiar with the subtleties of educational discourse, this issue of “content” may seem a bit strange. Such a person might ask, “Do not all lessons taught in the school have a content?” This question is addressed in the
analysis of the educational slogan "We teach students, not subjects." This slogan is often associated with Progressive educators. On the literal and logical level, this slogan is nonsensical. Conceptual analyses of ‘teaching’ have shown that for an activity to be considered “teaching,” there must be three necessary conditions: A teacher, a student, and subject matter. Some have also claimed that there needs to be an intent on the part of the teacher that learning take place. To speak, then, of “teaching students but not teaching subjects,” seems odd. On the practical level, however, it is clear what the slogan is prescribing. The slogan functions to encourage teachers to concentrate on, and attend to the particular needs and interests of individual students. Less important is the teaching of a rigid, standardized subject matter. Hence, a diminished emphasis on teaching a specific body of knowledge. A reduced concern for the transmission of a specific content.

**Content vs. Skills**

Another way the issue of content has been treated involves the distinction between content and skills. This distinction is at work in analyses of ‘knowledge’ which employ the categories “knowing that,” “knowing how,” and “knowing to.” Each of these categories are said to have its respective objectives, standards, and forms of assessment. Thus, knowing that involves the acquisition of what has been called propositional knowledge. For example, a student might come to know that Columbus is the capitol of Ohio. This type of knowledge is most often assessed by means of a test which is content specific. Such a test would seek to determine if students could demonstrate a knowledge of specific propositions, facts, and information.

*Knowing how*, involves what has been called performative knowledge. Such knowledge involves a student’s ability to perform certain tasks or skills. For example, students might know how to play a song on the piano, how to analyze and assess an argument, how to perform mathematical equations, how to play chess, or how to operate a computer. In short, then, “knowing that” involves an emphasis on content, and “knowing how” involves an emphasis on skills.

Further illustrative examples of this distinction between content and skills can be found in arguments over the curriculum in specific subject areas. For example, history educators have debated over whether the curriculum should emphasize a core content which all students are expected to learn (the important names, dates, and places in
history), or should the curriculum emphasize the cultivation of skills such as interpretation and analysis of historical events and texts. We see a similar debate in regard to moral education. Roger Straughan discusses this matter in his book, *Can We Teach Children to Be Good?*. He makes the distinction between the *content* and *form* of moral education. "The 'content' view will see moral education as being primarily concerned with passing on a definite subject matter in terms of specific rules and precepts about how to behave towards other people (e.g. the 'values transmission' approach), while the 'formal' view will emphasize certain ways of thinking and reasoning which children will need to acquire if they are to become 'morally educated' (e.g. the 'development of moral reasoning' approach)."

The discussion of content versus skills in the curriculum is also a concern for some philosophers of education who have written on the teaching of critical thinking. At first glance, this may appear unusual, because critical thinking is often regarded as being a skill or set of skills. In his book *Educating Reason*, Harvey Siegel discusses various conceptions of critical thinking. One of the important schools of thought on the matter of teaching critical thinking has been labeled the *Informal Logic Movement*. Siegel claims that much of the current interest in critical thinking and education can be traced to Robert H. Ennis' highly influential article, "The Concept of Critical Thinking." Ennis' work is regarded as the pioneering work for the *Informal Logic Movement*. This approach views critical thinking primarily in terms of involving skills necessary to assess statements. Siegel calls this a "pure skills" approach to critical thinking. "A person is a critical thinker if and only if she has the skills, abilities, or proficiencies necessary for the correct assessing of statements." These skills are said to be generally applicable to a wide variety of contexts.

A critic of this conception of critical thinking has been John McPeck. He has argued that critical thinking is subject specific. McPeck contends that such skills as identifying assumptions and the detection of logical fallacies, are not generalizable. Rather, assessing claims and arguments relies on a knowledge of the particular issues and standards of assessment for the specific subject area. In his assessment of McPeck's position, Siegel concludes: "McPeck is, I think, half right. He is right that logical knowledge regarding the nature of assumptions will not by itself enable students to
identify assumptions in all contexts. Specific knowledge of the subject matter at hand is typically required as well." Siegel elaborates on this point. "McPeck writes that 'Knowing what an assumption is, and knowing what a valid argument is is far from sufficient for enabling people to engage in effective critical thinking,' I agree. But it helps."^38

A Balance of Content and Skills

In his assessment of McPeck, Siegel brings attention to the need for a reasonable balance in the teaching of critical thinking. It is not a matter of content or skills, but content and skills. Straughan makes a similar argument for a balance between the content and form of moral education. I also feel that Bennett's proposals for the curriculum, for the most part, strike a reasonable balance between content and skills. In his review of the Social Studies curriculum for Bennett's "James Madison High School," John J. Patrick argues that this is the case. According to Patrick, Bennett's curricular proposals strike a good balance between two extremes. One extreme is what Patrick calls "the educational fallacy of formalism; this is the error of overemphasizing formal thinking processes to the point of disregarding content that is used by learners to develop intellectual capacities." On the opposite extreme, "overemphasis on content to the point of obscuring or ignoring higher-level learning and cognition, is also an error, which is perpetrated by those who believe that good education consists only in transmitting certain facts to all students." According to Patrick, "A great strength of the curriculum at James Madison High School is the treatment of content and cognitive processes in concert and the clear message that some bodies of knowledge are more valuable than others in general education for citizenship in our constitutional democracy."^39

In addition to this balance between content and cognitive skills, Patrick praises the James Madison curriculum for its coherence, integration of organization, academic validity, and the accuracy and integrity of course content. The strengths of this proposed curriculum are the result of what I take to be a sound and effective approach to pedagogy and curricular theory. With this approach, a relative mastery (I'm not sure if these terms are incompatible) of a core content (facts, dates, concepts, ideas, persons, events, places, etc.) is a pedagogical prerequisite for the subsequent development of higher order cognitive skills. For example, before a student can engage in an
examination and assessment of the causes of the Civil War, she must first possess some knowledge of the relevant historical facts. A mastery of basic content, then, is a necessary condition for the exercise of skills such as interpretation and assessment. Moreover, the exercise of these skills then functions to reinforce and broaden the student's knowledge of this basic content. Patrick comments on this pedagogical process: "A sound curriculum involves continuous and systematic blending of content and process, of the acquisition and application of knowledge. Content is more likely to be learned in-depth and remembered in time if learners are required to interact with it-to interpret, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate knowledge, not merely to receive it."40

In my own schooling, I can recall that one of my earliest experiences with this pedagogical approach was in my eighth grade American History class. The class was taught by Stan Krider. Mr. Krider would begin each unit by having the class go to the library and "look up" a number of terms which were listed on a worksheet. Resources and reference texts would be set out on a table for all the students to access. We were required to "define" each of the terms and state each item's significance. For example, when we studied the American labor movement, we began by identifying such terms, persons, and events as 'collective bargaining', 'scab', 'strike', 'arbitration'. Samuel Gompers, John L. Lewis, and the Taft-Hartley Act. A rudimentary acquaintance with these terms provided the knowledge of a foundational content which then enabled us to critically engage with these issues in an intelligent fashion. This "general knowledge of a foundational content." is what Hirsch calls "cultural literacy." He defines 'cultural literacy' as "the network of information that all competent readers possess. It is the background information, stored in their minds, that enables them to take up a newspaper and read it with an adequate level of comprehension, getting the point, grasping the implications, relating what they read to the unstated context which alone gives meaning to what they read."41

Thus, advocates of this pedagogical approach justify the emphasis on a core content in instrumental terms. This approach is said to be instrumentally valuable in promoting and facilitating the cognitive and intellectual development of students. In short, it promotes the achievement of education. Both Bennett, and more pointedly, E.D. Hirsch, argue that the instrumental benefits of cultural literacy extend both to the educational and social needs of the individual and to the social needs of the
community. Bennett argues that the content priorities outlined in "James Madison," will promote the acquisition of the requisite knowledge needed for effective participation in a community. Hirsch also explores the social benefits of cultural literacy. We will discuss the social utility of cultural literacy, later in the chapter. For now, allow me to restate what I take to be some of the strengths of Bennett's views on the place of content in the curriculum.

In his curriculum proposals, Bennett strikes an effective balance between content and skills. He recognizes that a general knowledge (often called "a working knowledge") of a specific content is a necessary condition for educational development. He does not argue that it is a sufficient condition, or that mastery of a specific content is an end in itself. Rather, he argues that a rudimentary knowledge of a basic content enables students to then exercise and develop their critical skills. I cited one of my own educational experiences to illustrate how such a pedagogical approach was effectively employed. I have also used this approach as a model for my own teaching. That a rudimentary knowledge of a specific content is instrumental in promoting education, seems undeniable. The curricular plan set forth in "James Madison High School" is a coherent and satisfactory attempt at offering a guide for how these educational aims might be achieved. In fact, if I were given the task of designing a curriculum for a high school, it would look much like Bennett's. If I were a teacher, I would feel comfortable operating with such a plan. However, this endorsement is not without a few qualifications and criticisms. Allow me to offer a few brief comments.

**Criticisms of a Core Content**

I would first like to comment on one of the common criticisms of a pedagogy which emphasizes a mastery of a core content. This criticism often takes the following form: "It is ridiculous to require students to memorize and be accountable for knowing a list of names, dates, and places. That is why we have dictionaries and encyclopedias. Teach the kids how to use these reference tools, and when they need to know something they can look it up themselves." Here is Hirsch's response to such criticism:

It is not enough to say that students can look these facts up. The research reviewed above shows that in order for readers to integrate phrases into comprehensible meanings, they must already possess specific, quickly available schemata. When readers constantly lack crucial information, dictionaries and encyclopedias become quite impractical tools. A consistent lack of necessary information can make
the reading process so laborious and uncommunicative that it fails to convey meaning.**43**

Again, I think Hirsch's point is well taken. Knowledge of a core content need not occur at the expense of cognitive skills, but rather, a knowledge of content and skills can be an effective tandem in promoting education. However, there is always the danger that teaching a core content may---in some cases---be at the expense of developing higher level thinking skills. We see this happening in the phenomenon of "teaching to the test." As I mentioned earlier, knowledge of a core content is most easily assessed by content specific tests. Whether or not teachers and students have achieved standardized curricular goals is largely determined by such tests. Commenting on how Hirsch's "List of What Literate Americans Know," might be implemented in schools, Thomas G. Carroll states: "In American education, lists become tests."**44**

Given the demands, pressures, deadlines, and time constraints facing teachers, when presented with content specific standards, there is the temptation to teach the information is such a way that students can score well on the standardized tests. This often involves "cramming," rote memorization of abstract decontextualized information, and the "regurgitation" of the information on the test. In short, knowledge of content becomes an end in itself. In such cases, knowledge of a core content does not function as a foundation for critical thinking skills; Nor are critical thinking skills developed or allowed to function to reinforce knowledge of the core content. However, this tendency to "teach to the test," is not a necessary consequence of Hirsch and Bennett's emphasis on core content. But rather, it represents a failure to accurately understand or to effectively implement their curricular approach.

I am, for the most part, sympathetic to Hirsch's claims for the instrumental value of a knowledge of foundational core content. Hirsch quotes columnist William Raspberry to illustrate the educational utility of a knowledge of content: "The more you know, the more you can learn." Hirsch elaborates on this idea:

Supplying missing knowledge to children early is of tremendous importance for enhancing their motivation and intellectual self-confidence, not to mention their subsequent ability to learn new materials. Yet schools will never systematically impart missing background information as long as they continue to accept the formalistic principle that specific information is irrelevant to "language arts skills."**45**

I am inclined to agree. Moreover, I feel that teachers would be wise to carefully
consider Hirsch’s suggestions, and the possibilities offered by a pedagogy which employs an effective balance of teaching both facts and skills. Hirsch writes:

The polarization of educationists into facts-people versus skills-people has no basis in reason. Facts and skills are inseparable. There is no insurmountable reason why those who advocate the teaching of higher order skills and those who advocate the teaching of common traditional content should not join forces. No philosophical or practical barrier prevents them from doing so, and all who consider mature literacy to be a paramount aim of education will wish them to do so.46

Thus far, we have examined Bennett and Hirsch’s curricular emphasis on a core content that all students should know. I have noted that they argue for this emphasis on instrumental grounds. I would like to make a distinction here. Namely, the distinction between the claim that knowledge of a core content is instrumentally valuable for education; And the claim or argument that education is instrumentally valuable. We have, to this point, been concerned with the former. That is, we have been concerned with Bennett and Hirsch’s arguments that knowledge of a core content is instrumentally valuable in promoting education. They argue that cultural literacy is a necessary (though not necessarily sufficient) condition for education.

We will now examine Bennett’s arguments for the content of the content. Namely, a content that emphasizes the Western intellectual tradition. In these arguments, Bennett attempts to establish the value of such an education. He argues for its social utility, and he also defends education (so conceived) on philosophical grounds. I will now examine Bennett’s arguments, and make some comments.

WESTERN CULTURE IS OUR CULTURE

As we noted previously, Bennett argues that American schools should emphasize a core curriculum rooted in Western culture because it is our cultural tradition. He contends that our political, religious, and intellectual heritage is comprised of the ideas, principles, and works of Western culture. Therefore, in order for an individual to communicate and function effectively in our cultural context, it is necessary to possess a general knowledge and understanding of one’s cultural tradition. Philosopher John Searle makes a similar argument. In the book Debating P.C., Searle contributes an article titled “The Storm Over The University.” In this piece, Searle writes, “The student should have enough knowledge of his or her cultural tradition to know how it got to be the way it is. . . . The United States is, after all, a product of the European
Enlightenment."\(^{47}\)

Bennett is thus arguing for his curriculum on instrumental grounds. An education grounded in Western culture, according to Bennett, is valuable because it enables individuals who live in this culture to communicate effectively and to thrive socially and economically. Hirsch comments as follows on the social utility of being culturally literate in one's own culture:

> I hope that in our future debates about the extensive curriculum, the participants will keep in view the high stakes involved in their deliberations: breaking the cycle of illiteracy for deprived children; raising the living standard of families who have been illiterate; making our country more competitive in international markets; achieving greater social justice; enabling all citizens to participate in the political process; bringing us closer to the Ciceronian ideal of universal public discourse—in short, achieving fundamental goals of the Founders at the birth of the republic.\(^{48}\)

Hirsch is careful to add, that knowledge of one's own culture does not come naturally. Rather, such knowledge is the result of the intentional efforts of educators to impart cultural information to the young. "Left to itself, a child will not grow into a thriving creature; Tarzan is pure fantasy. To thrive, a child needs to learn the traditions of the particular human society and culture it is born into. Like children everywhere, American children need traditional information at a very early age."\(^{49}\) Hirsch contends that "cultural literacy constitutes the only sure avenue of opportunity for disadvantaged children, the only reliable way of combating the social determinism that now condemns them to remain in the same social and educational condition as their parents."\(^{50}\)

Along with their arguments for the instrumental value of cultural literacy, both Hirsch and Bennett are insistent in their charge that American schools have failed to cultivate culturally literate students. As we have noted several times, Bennett cites the locus of this putative failure in the educational changes of the 1960s and 1970s. These changes led to what Bennett calls "the fragmented curriculum," or "the shattered humanities." Curricular approaches which, he claims, had abandoned the important task of teaching a core cultural content. Hirsch assigns the blame to the dominance of "romantic formalism" in educational theory and practice. Hirsch argues that this educational theory finds its roots in what he calls "the Rousseau-Dewey tradition." He claims that this tradition is mistaken in its emphasis on skills rather than on specific content. Hirsch writes:
Any educational movement that avoids coming to terms with the specific contents of literate education or evades the responsibility of conveying them to all citizens is committing a fundamental error. However noble its aims, any movement that deprecates facts as antiquated or irrelevant injures the cause of higher national literacy. The old prejudice that facts deaden the minds of children has a long history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and includes not just the disciples of Rousseau and Dewey but also Charles Dickens who, in the figure of Mr. Gradgrind in *Hard Times*, satirized the teaching of mere facts. But it isn’t facts that deaden the minds of young children, who are storing facts in their minds every day with astonishing voracity. It is incoherence—our failure to ensure that a pattern of shared, vividly taught, and socially enabling knowledge will emerge from our instruction.51

We could no doubt discuss these issues of educational theory and history at length. But what I would like to call attention to now, is that there does seem to be some widespread agreement with Bennett and Hirsch in their contention that American students, on the whole, are ignorant of the basic facts, persons, ideas, and events which comprise their cultural and intellectual heritage. We are deluged by reports from the media about tests and reports which supposedly confirm the cultural illiteracy of the bulk of our students. We are told about students who can name more brand names of beer than they can name U.S. Presidents. Last night I heard a speech snippet from Bob Dole, on National Public Radio (2-26-96). Dole claimed that “America is on the wrong track.” As an example, he claimed that “our schools are graduating students who can’t find California on the map.”52

In my own teaching, I am often reminded that I must be cautious about assuming that there is a core content of cultural information which all, or most, of my students are knowledgeable about. For example, in my lessons on the concept of ‘indoctrination’. I used an illustration in which I referred to Chairman Mao’s “Little Red Book.” I used this illustration for several Quarters, until I realized (by a show of hands) that many students did not know who I was talking about. When I discovered this, I found it incredible that so many students had no knowledge of this monumental historical figure. I would often use this incident as a launching pad to go into a “Bennett-like” indictment of our schools’ failure to teach students basic content.

However, as I gave the matter more thought, I changed my approach. When finding that students are ignorant of Mao (or John Dewey, Oliver Twist, The First Amendment, Socrates, etc.), rather than browbeat them for their ignorance, or berate their academic preparation, I seek to explain to the students who Mao was, why he is
important, and where they might look to find out more about him. In other words, given
my belief that certain knowledge can be instrumentally valuable, I felt my teaching might
be better served by helping the students acquire this basic content, than by lamenting
the students' lack of knowledge.

THE VALUE OF CULTURAL LITERACY

I have previously noted my agreement with Bennett and Hirsch, that knowledge
of basic content is instrumentally valuable in an educational context. I have also set
forth their claims that cultural literacy is instrumentally valuable in wider social,
political, and economic contexts.53 Although I would concur, I think a brief discussion
of a common criticism of the utility of cultural literacy is in order. The criticism goes
something like this: "What possible practical value can be derived from a knowledge of
the items on Hirsch's list? Perhaps such knowledge would be valuable in a game of
Trivial Pursuit or on Jeopardy, but will such knowledge be of value in the line of work I
choose to pursue?" This same question is raised in the John Ford directed western, The
Man Who Shot Liberty Valance.54 In this film, James Stewart plays a bookish lawyer
who has just moved to a frontier town. He is confronted by a local outlaw and frontier
bully, Liberty Valance (played by Lee Marvin). In this context of gunfights and
precarious struggles for survival, John Wayne befriends Stewart, and asks him, "What
good are all your books and learning out here?"

I think this question is applicable to Bennett and Hirsch's curriculum proposals.
The curriculum proposals of conservatives have often been criticized for their emphasis
on works by "dead, white, European males." It is the putative "deadness" that is at issue
here. That is, knowledge of the classic art and culture of the West is sometimes seen as
distant, irrelevant, dated, and of no immediate practical application in our contemporary
society.55 I again turn to the cinema for a possible counter example to this charge that
knowledge of the classics is irrelevant and of little instrumental value. I have in mind
two films; Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade,56 and Seven.57 In the first film, Indiana
Jones is an anthropology professor and an adventurer. He is a literate intellectual, but
he is no egghead or nerd. He is a heroic character who demonstrates that it is cool to be
cultured. His exploits demonstrate that a knowledge of the classics can be useful. This
is most clearly demonstrated in the closing scenes of the film, when Indiana’s knowledge of classical literature enables him to solve mysteries, overcome obstacles, and ultimately to capture the Holy Grail.

In the movie *Seven*, Morgan Freeman plays a police detective who spends his spare time reading classic literature. His knowledge of the classics provides him with the cognitive schemata which enables him to ascertain the pattern of a series of homicides. The perpetrator’s *modus operandi* was to kill people in a pattern based on the “seven deadly sins.” The seven deadly sins were, of course, a common theme in classical literature.58

Granted, these examples are far-fetched. As Hirsch cautions in regard to the utility of cultural knowledge, “The moral of this tale is not that reading Shakespeare will help one rise in the business world.”59 Nor, to use my examples, is knowledge of the classics a sure-fire means to get the girl, find the Holy Grail, or solve the case. Rather, the instrumental value of cultural literacy (for an individual or society as a whole) is more subtle, broader, and less immediate.

Allow me to make a few brief comments on the instrumental value of a knowledge of one’s cultural heritage. Often times, we speak of our work as being done “on the shoulders” of those who came before us. This phrase expresses the acknowledgement that our work is not created *ex nihilo*, but rather involves a progression or extension of previous work. We find that our predecessors often debated, discussed, and examined the same issues and problems which we are working on. Knowledge of our predecessors’ work can serve as a model to build on, and as a warning of mistakes to be avoided. To use another metaphor, knowledge of our cultural tradition helps us to avoid the need to “reinvent the wheel.”

Along the same lines, our cultural heritage provides a valuable resource which can be appropriated to add color, flavor, humor, insightful illustrations, and instructive analogies to our work. Though the cases of Indiana Jones and Morgan Freeman’s detective may be unlikely, it is evident that the makers of these films made good use of their knowledge of culture in a way that was commercially and artistically successful. It seems clear that a knowledge of one’s cultural heritage provides one with information which can be fruitfully employed in writing, art, public speech, music, and many other activities. To the degree that such knowledge is commonly shared by a society, it can be
valuable in enabling people to enjoy, appreciate, and critique each other's work.

That there are great benefits to having a knowledge of one's cultural heritage is undeniable. I am also sympathetic with Bennett's contention that a common knowledge of our cultural heritage provides a useful intellectual foundation for effective participation in our society. Therefore, as an educator, I see benefit in becoming more knowledgeable about our nation's cultural heritage, and in working to provide my students with such knowledge. However, there is another criticism of Bennett's core curriculum proposals which I think has some force.

**CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND THE CURRICULUM**

Bennett's suggestions for a core curriculum featuring our common culture have also been criticized for failing to come to grips with America's cultural diversity. This matter is usually discussed under the rubric of *multicultural education*. The issue of multicultural education is very involved, and the literature on the subject is voluminous. For our purposes, allow me to touch on one facet of the discussion. Given America's cultural diversity, educators are faced with the question of how they should socialize and educate youngsters. Richard Pratte addresses this question by discussing several ideological approaches which have historically guided educational practice in regard to America's cultural diversity.60

One such approach is *assimilation*. We see assimilation as the guiding principle in the Americanization movement in the public schools during the early part of this century.61 This movement was fueled by the desire to assimilate immigrants into America's dominant culture. Assimilationists see little value in cultural diversity, and in most cases see cultural diversity as an undesirable condition which should be overcome. This is in contrast to the position of pluralism. Pluralists greatly value cultural diversity. They argue that cultural distinctives should be prized, celebrated, and preserved. Most proponents of multicultural education operate from the position of pluralism. Many pluralists have charged Bennett's proposals for promoting a common culture with failing to appreciate, understand, and respect America's cultural diversity.

Let us now consider an example of such a criticism. In his article "Who Owns Culture?" Thomas G. Carroll examines the current debates over culture and the curriculum. On one side of the debate are conservatives such as Bennett, who have
attempted "to place the classical Western intellectual tradition at the core of the curriculum at all levels of education." On the other side are "those who believe we live in a world community engaged with the reality of cultural diversity on a daily basis. Proposals to establish a core curriculum based exclusively on the great works of Western literature challenge the hard-won gains achieved by the social justice movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and these suggestions have variously been attacked as ethnocentric, elitist, antidemocratic, sexist, and racist."62

To illuminate the central issues of this debate, Carroll appeals to Margaret Mead's brief book, Culture and Commitment (1969).63 Carroll applies Mead's distinction between traditional cultures and learning cultures to the debate. He writes:

A traditional culture derives authority from the past, or, as Mead terms it: "The past of the adults is the future of each new generation." These cultures operate on the basis of a strong, unquestioned consensus about all aspects of knowledge and action. To maintain the continuity of this consensus, change is assimilated so that any differences that might arise between traditional values and new knowledge disappear. In a very real sense, a traditional culture belongs to the elders of the community in that they control its content and transmit it to their children as their heritage. Children in such cultures are expected to develop unquestioned commitments to absolute values that are central to what are believed to be timeless traditions.64

During the 1960s, in the United States, political, economic, and technological changes occurred which called into question the moral and intellectual authority of the traditional culture. According to Carroll, conservative voices for curricular reform, such as Bennett, Hirsch, Alan Bloom, and Lynne Cheney, are attempting to preserve the authority of the traditional culture against these challenges. Carroll's comments on the dynamics of this situation are instructive:

Mead reminds us that as the unquestioned consensus of traditional societies begins to break down in the face of an inability to assimilate major changes, nativistic revivalism may develop in the form of dogmatic religious and political movements. As a traditional culture breaks down, its members may believe they are witnessing a crisis equivalent to the end of the world, since the order of the world as they know it is collapsing. In response, attempts are made by some members of the culture to return to the security of traditional ways through revitalization and purification of core values. The return to the traditional becomes idealized as a utopian goal that is contrasted with acceptance of change, which is seen as deficient or evil, it is thought that failure to restore the traditional system will result in the perpetuation of evil and the ultimate destruction of society. As the elders of the community work to reestablish these traditions, their basic elements become far more rigid and intractable because they are no longer orthodoxies; they must be defended in a world
where conflicting points of view are prevalent and accessible. In the current educational debate, the proponents of the classical Western tradition are engaged in a nativist reaction to the cultural changes we have experienced over the past 20 years. They are striving mightily to "reform" education by reestablishing the classical Western intellectual tradition as the core of American education.65

According to Carroll, the challenge to the authority of the traditional culture has come from what Mead called "learning cultures." Carroll writes: "But in contrast to earlier times, this effort at directed assimilation is not being accepted by minority groups, immigrant populations, and women, who now feel increasingly entitled to participate in this culture on their own terms. In this country, and everywhere in the world, we are seeing the decline of hierarchical authority and closed systems. In the place of traditional cultures we see the rise of learning cultures built on the shared knowledge and experience of all their participants." Carroll then elaborates on the reasons the authority of the traditional culture has been challenged by learning cultures:

There is not place in a learning culture for resorting to authority to prescribe a specific body of literature, a sequence of courses, or a particular system of thought that must be mastered as a precondition for participation. A learning culture belongs not to the elders but to its creators, and it is created by all who live it on a daily basis. Learning cultures reject the rationale that a particular body of literature should be studied because it has "prevailed in the referendum of history," since many of their participants were disenfranchised when the vote was taken. These individuals are now exercising their authority to choose what they will know and do. As a result, we are seeing a reconfiguration of the culture to include a greater diversity of traditions which includes, but is not limited to, the classical Western core.66

Carroll then summarizes the current educational debate as "a conflict between those who want to reform education by returning to the authority of the past, and to the idea of transmitting a uniform cultural tradition in the schools, and those who want to restructure education to support the development of a more participatory, diverse, and inclusive learning culture, which incorporates, on an ongoing basis, new knowledge and core traditions."67

**Weaknesses of Bennett's Proposals**

As I argued previously, Bennett's calls for a curricular emphasis on Western culture might be justified for its instrumental value. At the same time, I think a good case can also be made for the educational and social value of a curriculum which avails itself to the insights, perspectives, and knowledge which our society's cultural diversity
offers. Unfortunately, Bennett's views in theory and practice can be faulted for failing to achieve an effective balance on this matter. In the first place, sections of "James Madison High School" indicate that he views student differences as an obstacle to overcome, rather than as an educational resource to tap into. Carrol cites a passage from "JMHS," and makes the following criticism. "In this passage we see cultural difference defined as an obstacle to the effort to achieve high standards and excellence, where the standards are mastery of Western thought. Differences in the children's languages and cultural backgrounds are not seen as diverse and valuable sources of knowledge and experience that make valuable contributions to the school's educational program and our nation's participation in a world culture."68

Another weakness of Bennett's approach to cultural diversity is related to the above criticism. Namely, his unwarranted claims for the superiority and privileged status of Western culture. In his zeal to praise the primacy of the West, he exudes a smugness which is unjustified, and in my opinion, serves no educational purpose. We can see this in his suggestion that the Western Intellectual tradition be "the platform from which other cultures are studied." Clearly, this is a condescending approach which flies in the face of the demand from various cultural groups to be heard on "their own terms." Perhaps because of this cultural smugness, Bennett's approach to the curriculum often seems to include the study of other cultures as an insignificant afterthought, or in the form of token inclusion. Stanley Fish notes a similar tendency in Lynne Cheney's (Bennett's successor at NEH) curricular proposals. Cheney maintains that in addition to the texts of Western civilization, students should "also be encouraged to learn about other cultures."69 Fish comments:

The work done by Cheney's "also"--"should also be encouraged"--is done elsewhere by what I call the "and Alice Walker" move, performed when you make up a low list of great texts from Plato to T.S. Eliot and then say, "and Alice Walker," thus testifying to your commitment to diversity. Bennett prefers Martin Luther King, Jr., as his token and now has taken to adding Coretta Scott King and Corazon Aquino, a new odd couple pressed into the service of displaying the capaciousness of the former secretary's mind. And Cheney now has kind words (at the end of a paragraph) for Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass. Can Jackie Robinson be far behind?70

Jeff Zorn also criticizes Bennett on this matter. Zorn charges that Bennett's suggested use of Martin Luther King's works in the humanities curriculum is an exercise
in "mock-diversifying the core curriculum." Zorn contends that King should be read in schools, but not in the spirit that Bennett suggests. Zorn argues that in his zeal to uphold the loftiness of "our civilization," Bennett has co-opted King's legacy in a way that perverts the progressive and revolutionary nature of King's ideals and public career. Zorn comments:

If a Western cultural legacy undergirded Martin Luther King's movement, an equally rooted legacy undergirded the opposition, a legacy of intolerance, complacency, ill-gained privilege, and hatred of that which is different. King fought that other legacy with all his physical, spiritual, and intellectual might. It demeans the victories he won, and the suffering and premature death he endured, when conservatives like Bennett and Bloom now sniff that victory was 'in the cards' from the get-go. America being America. They suggest, fatuously, that black people just had not been saying the right things in their previous centuries of enslavement and legalized suppression here.

I will now sum up my criticisms of Bennett's views on this matter. I agree that it is important that students have a shared knowledge about the Western cultural and intellectual tradition. We do live in a society whose history, and and whose social and political institutions are largely the product of the Western cultural tradition. Therefore, a knowledge of this tradition can have great instrumental value. However, in some ways, Bennett's curricular suggestions seem to be an attempt to extend the intellectual and cultural authority of the West beyond what is warranted. That is, appeals to the study of the West because it is "the best," when made in lieu of the instrumental value of such study, seems unjustified. Such appeals are--in effect--arguments from the authority of tradition, for the continuing authority of tradition. In other words, Bennett's attempts to emphasize Western culture are often exercises in preserving tradition rather than efforts to empower and educate students. This is apparent in Bennett's claim that in addition to studying Western culture we need also to "value and defend the West." I can heartily endorse the study of Western culture, but his call to defend and value the West seems to involve a political agenda to which I can not concur.

At times, Bennett's traditional emphasis can be at the expense of the study of other cultures, and to the detriment of study that is critical of the West. I previously quoted Hirsch's suggestion that educators can and should emphasize both skills and content (not skills or content). I feel a similar balance between the study of Western
culture and multicultural education can and should be pursued by educators. As Catherine Stimpson suggests, "I am baffled why we cannot be students of Western culture and of multiculturalism at the same time, why we cannot show the historical and present-day relations among many cultures. As literary critics, we can also read and teach both the Western and multicultural text." In Bennett’s case, such a balance is precluded by his insistence on attempting to demonstrate the intellectual, political, and moral superiority of the West. Let us now turn to a closer examination of this matter.

WESTERN CULTURE IS THE BEST

Earlier in this chapter I set forth Bennett’s claims concerning the superiority of the Western intellectual and political tradition. I noted that in making these grand historical calculations and hierarchical rankings, Bennett seems to be operating from a “final judgment” metaphor. This can be seen in his use of the phrase “catalogs of sins and errors.” This metaphor draws on the biblical notions of a Book of Life, in which were written the names of those who had been granted salvation and eternal life. Those who were not in the book were out of luck. This “final judgment” metaphor has been given many spils. The typical use of the metaphor involves a cumulative accounting and assessment of an individual’s actions. This assessment is performed by someone who has access to all the pertinent information, and who also possesses and abides by all the principles of judgment which are necessary to “make the right call.” This role is usually played by God, but St. Peter is a popular stand-in in many folk tales.

When God renders his decision, it is often done in a strict either-or fashion. The individual is consigned to either heaven or hell; either paradise or the lake of fire; either pass or fail. A cosmic critic’s choice. The individual is judged with an ineluctable and everlasting “thumbs up” or “thumbs down.” In other accounts, God renders his decision by assigning individuals to hierarchical levels of reward and punishment. A classic example of this scenario would be Dante’s depiction of Hell as being a series of descending levels of punishment, each marked by an increased severity. The discussion about degrees of eternal punishment or eternal rewards has often occupied evangelical theologians. There is a certain tension in these debates. As I see it, the tension is, first of all, a result of the evangelical emphasis on a strict dichotomy in regard
to the eternal destiny of humanity. According to the evangelical, an individual is either saved or lost, either converted or unregenerate. For the evangelical there is no purgatory. There is no metaphysical pending tray for souls.

At the same time, the inquiring evangelical must be ready to give a defense of this eschatology. For example, a critic might say to the evangelical: “According to your eschatology, both Adolph Hitler and the kindly--but atheistic--old lady will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire. How can such a thing be considered righteous and just?” In response, some theologians have latched on to an obscure passage or two, wherein they find textual evidence that there are degrees of punishment in Hell. Similar discussions have involved the question of degrees of reward in Heaven. The point I would like to make here, is that all of these grand metaphysical speculations are epistemically dubious. So are Bennett’s claims about the historical, intellectual, and political superiority of Western civilization.

**Choosing The Best and Relativism**

In the first place, the notion that we are somehow able to rank the respective contributions of the world’s cultures, is dubious. Bennett might charge that my reluctance to cast my vote in the referendum on history’s cultures is “relativistic.” His argument on this point is familiar. He claims that because one refuses to make some abstract judgment that one culture or intellectual tradition is “better,” or “the best,” then that person is a relativist. It is assumed in Bennett’s charges (though seldom explicated), that relativism is a philosophically deficient position which has pernicious social consequences. In his caricature of the relativist, Bennett inaccurately suggests that if one embraces relativism then she thereby abandons any philosophical grounding on which to make judgments. Thus, Bennett can argue that because one hedges from testifying to the glories of the Western political tradition then she can be charged with “doubting the preferability of civilization to savagery, of democracy to totalitarianism.” This move on Bennett’s part is unacceptable, and I would like to make some more brief comments on this matter.

To begin, it may be the case that a person refuses to make a hierarchical ranking of cultures because she feels the question is bogus. Let me illustrate with the following example. Suppose I am a member of the Motion Picture Academy. When it comes to “Oscar time,” I may refuse to participate in the voting because I see no point or reason to
select a best actor, or best movie. This does not mean I am therefore a relativist who has abandoned all philosophical grounding on which to make aesthetic judgments. It does not mean that I think all movies or performances are equal. It simply means that I view the question of which work is "best" as a rather pointless question, to which there is no agreed upon method of answering.

It is for these same reasons that I regard Bennett's arguments that "the West is the best," as fatuous. As James Atlas points out in The Battle of the Books, "Why do we study English and American literature? Not to prove its superiority, not to impose upon minorities a literature that's alien to their experience." But rather, as Hirsch argues, we study the classics "for purely functional reasons." Hirsch's pragmatic views on this matter are in stark contrast to Bennett's posturing on the West's putative superiority. Hirsch writes, "Pragmatists in the school of Dewey are right to say that the 'higher values' traditionalists invoke are not the special property of Western culture. Higher values comprising humankind's accumulated wisdom about human nature are found in all civilized traditions, East and West, ancient and modern, popular and aristocratic. Confucius is as wise as Socrates."81

Moreover, just because one refuses to judge Plato as a superior philosopher to Lao Zi, for instance, does not mean that one holds the position that all works of philosophy and literature are of equal merit. As Michael Berube' writes in response to this caricature of relativism:

Neither I nor any of my known colleagues, past or present, have ever operated on the principle that all books are "equal." However, I confess that we have done a number of things no less corrosive: we have suggested that literary texts have many potential uses, and that some texts are better for some purposes than others; we have pointed out the "literary quality" has never been the sole criterion for canonical works, since many of them, like Everyman, are canonical today largely because they are of great historical interest; we have gone so far as to remark that the boundary between the "literary" and the "nonliterary" text does not rest on stable or self-evident distinctions, and that the boundary has shifted considerably over the history of the past few centuries.82

Stanley Fish makes a similar argument. He contends that simply because someone refuses to base judgments on transcendent, abstract standards, this does not mean that one has abandoned the possibility--or desirability--of making judgments. Fish acknowledges that this practice is a brand of "relativism"; If 'relativism' means that all normative judgments are relative to the particular context in question. It does not
mean, however, that all judgments are equal, or that all works being judged are equal. Fish explains:

Isn't this relativism? The question always raises itself whenever someone argues that judgments as to what is fair or meritorious flow from local contexts rather than from the identification of transcendent or general standards. The question seems urgent because of the fear that if judgments are relative to particular contexts and there is no context of contexts—no source of authority so compelling that everyone, no matter what his or her history, education, political situation, etc., defers to it—then there is no way to tell the difference between right and wrong, to prefer one argument to another, to distinguish Shakespeare from graffiti. This fear imagines human agents as standing apart from all contexts of judgment and faced with the task of identifying the right and true ones. But as I argue in "The Common Touch," none of us is ever in that "originary" position, unattached to any normative assumptions and waiting for external guidance; rather, we are always and already embedded in one or more practices whose norms, rules, and aspirations we have internalized, and therefore we are not only capable of making distinctions and passing judgments but cannot refrain from doing so. 83

A Historical Precedent: Matthew Arnold

Yet, Bennett remains steadfast in his proclamation of the West's superiority. I think it is clear that this rhetoric on Bennett's part has a political function. It is intended to serve as a conservative measure, and as an effort to reclaim the dominance and authority of traditional Western culture in those contexts where such dominance has been challenged. An illustrative historical precedent to Bennett's position on this matter can be found in the rhetoric of Matthew Arnold. I have noted several times Bennett's penchant for citing Matthew Arnold's view that the curriculum should serve the function of preserving and transmitting "the best that is thought and known in the world." As with Bennett, Arnold's arguments for a study of "the best" cultural tradition are occasioned by political and intellectual challenges to the dominant culture of their respective eras. Arnold's views on this matter are given their clearest expression in the book Culture and Anarchy (1869). 84 The similarities between Arnold's call for a study of a common culture and those of Bennett are striking. These similarities are noted in William Spanos' comments on Arnold's defense of "the best" cultural tradition:

Given his commitment to the binary logic of the Western metaphysical tradition, Arnold's confrontation in Culture and Anarchy with an "epoch of expansion"—the dislocating intellectual, cultural, social, and political irruptions of the industrialized nineteenth century—takes the inevitable form of re-collection and re-action. He represents the disintegration of theological doctrine and sanctions, sociopolitical hierarchies, and classical humanistic educational goals in the face of the proliferation of scientific,
anthropological, sexual, geological (and thus Biblical) knowledge as essentially negative phenomena. For Arnold, the increasing demand for electoral reforms, educational opportunities, and a more equitable distribution of wealth are manifestations of the disintegration of culture. . . Such anarchy threatens the very well-being of Western Man, both individually and collectively.85

As Berube' notes, "Although many culturally literate people know Arnold's Culture and Anarchy by title, very few will recall that Arnold had sought in 1869 to rescue culture from the anarchy of democratic society."86

It is evident that both Bennett and Arnold are attempting to argue that a particular cultural tradition is "the best." In both cases, these arguments are occasioned by the perceived need to defend the political and intellectual authority of a particular cultural tradition against mounting challenges. The goal being, to preserve and maintain the dominance of the cultural tradition in educational policy and practice. Thus, the curriculum is seen as a conservative political tool. It is on this point that Hirsch and Bennett again part ways. Just as Hirsch refused to justify his curriculum suggestions by appealing to the superiority of Western culture, so he refuses to assent to the proposition that a curriculum featuring a common cultural content need serve a conservative political function. Rather, Hirsch argues that mastery of content is a politically neutral tool which can serve as a resource for conservative, progressive, and radical political action. To illustrate this point, Hirsch cites a newsletter from the Black Panthers (1974). Hirsch notes that the newsletter draws on a knowledge of America's political traditions to frame its arguments for social, political, and economic change. As Hirsch concludes, "Radicalism in politics, but conservatism in literate knowledge and spelling: to be a conservative in the means of communication is the road to effectiveness in modern life, in whatever direction one wishes to be effective."87

More Criticisms of Bennett’s Views

Because of Hirsch’s apparent commitment to empowering students, he has been characterized by James Atlas as “someone who is trying to help.” Bennett, on the other hand, insists on defending the superiority of the West, and prescribing educational policy which has the express goal of preserving the dominance of a particular cultural, political, and social vision. I am of the opinion that this tendency on Bennett’s part,
when implemented in educational practice, has undesirable educational and political consequences.

For example, it has been argued that Bennett’s emphasis on the classics in the curriculum is done in a conservative spirit which might not be pedagogically conducive for promoting quality work on the part of students. This is the argument made by Frank A. Moretti in the article “Who Controls the Canon? A Classicist in Conversation With Cultural Conservatives.” He charges that cultural conservatives’ approach to the classics is contrary to the critical spirit which pervades the classics. He writes, “Consider Plato, a child of the poets, who knew that only by transcending that tuition could he shape the vision his age demanded. Thus emerges the apparent irony that those who stand for stultification have appropriated the classics, created by the Iconoclasts of past ages, as quickly as they mindlessly march behind the banners of the right to life, seek public decrees against homosexuality, and through passivity, deprecate the lives of those of the Third World.”

Bennett’s rhetoric on the superiority of the West involves the projection of a mystified, romantic vision of an authoritative common culture. He is a warrior defending the West: A preacher, proclaiming the redeeming power of a societal return to that old time Culture. When translated into educational practice, the result can be a pedagogy which serves a conservative function rather than fostering a critical disposition on the part of students. Jonathan Smith comments on Bennett’s “To Reclaim a Legacy”:

Bennett makes no attempt at definition. Western civilization is assumed to be a self-evident, fully incarnate entity in a manner that would make any self-respecting theologian blush with shame. There are no recognitions of complexity of thought, taxonomy, or history. For all its exceedingly occasional use of words such as “inquiry,” the Report exhibits a distressingly unproblematic and essentially passive notion of the educational enterprise. Education is depicted as conveying, transmitting, and appreciating, instead of being a matter of challenge and work. If Bennett’s view of the humanities is limited and degrading, his understanding of education is even more so.

Jeff Zorn makes a similar criticism of Bennett:

This work in the humanities should develop students’ abilities to inquire after what Bennett calls “life’s enduring, fundamental questions.” Bennett’s approach leads to no such inquiry; he seems to distrust open inquiry for fear it will lessen student’s zeal to defend “Western civilization” in all the particulars of the moment. I too would have students learn the intellectual legacy of their society, but I would not sugar-coat the presentation and limit the selections accordingly, as Bennett does. His
approach leaves students to wonder where—if Socrates and Jesus and
Dante "virtually define" the Western mind—the Heinrich Himmlers and
Bull Connors, the Charles Mansons and Charles Keatings come from.90
Zorn adds, "William Bennett’s preferred learning in the humanities is fleeting and false,
beckoning students always to respond in their smarmiest voices, ‘Yes, teacher, that
really was great.’ Martin Luther King, no less than Sophocles and Dante and
Shakespeare and the rest, deserves a lot better."

**Bennett and Alan Bloom**

It might be in order here, to make a few comments on Allan Bloom, and his
famous book, *The Closing of the American Mind*.91 Both Bloom and Bennett hold
similar views on the superiority of Western culture, literature, and philosophy. Both cite
relativism and multiculturalism as the greatest threats to the authority of Western
culture. The pair have been dubbed as "the killer Bs" for their role in the debates over
culture and the curriculum. But as with Bennett, the paradoxes, incongruities, and
contradictions of Bloom’s views have not gone unnoticed. The subtitle of Bloom’s book
is, "How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy And Impoverished The Souls Of
Today’s Students.” However, Benjamin Barber has convincingly argued that Bloom’s
views are anti-democratic. Barber claims: “The appeal to great books in Bloom’s school of
thought is an appeal to a tradition of elite discourse that considers genuine literacy a
preserve of the few, and regards illiteracy as an intractable condition of the many.”92 To
illustrate the anti-democratic tenor of Bloom’s views, Barber cites an essay Bloom wrote
in the Sixties. In the essay Bloom claimed: “The university is supposed to educate those
who are more intelligent and to set up standards for their achievement which cannot be
met by most men and women. This can not but be irritating to democratic sensibilities.”
Barber charges that for Bloom, “the open mind may function best in the closed
university.”93

In the article “Bennett, Bloom and Boyer: Toward a Critical Discussion,” Charles
Reitz claims that “Bloom is then actually calling for the closing of the American mind
around what he believes is the only real common good: liberal learning in its classic
sense.”94 In her review of Bloom’s book, Martha Nussbaum notes the irony of Bloom’s
appropriation of the classics. “Bloom knows that he knows. Socrates knew that he
Alternative Pedagogical Suggestions

Having made these criticisms of Bloom's and Bennett's views, I would like to suggest a couple pedagogical approaches which I feel hold some promise for dealing with the difficult issues pertaining to culture and the curriculum. The first approach is found in Gerald Graff's book, *Beyond the Culture Wars*. Graff explicates and argues for a pedagogical approach which he refers to as "teaching the conflicts." He suggests incorporating the current debates over the curriculum as an important element in the curriculum. A second approach is suggested in Benjamin Barber's *An Aristocracy of Everyone*. Barber offers suggestions for teaching democracy through community service. He argues for a pedagogy which strikes a balance between what he takes to be the excesses of both traditionalists and postmodernists. He writes:

The educator’s art is to prompt questions that expose our illusions and at the same time to tether illusion to provisional moorings. The teacher must know how to arouse but also how to mollify the faculty of doubt. Her special art is moderation. She will question whether the statements “This is good! This is beautiful! This is justice!” mean something more than “I control the discourse! I define art! I am justice.” But her aim will be to distinguish the counterfeit from the real rather than to expunge the very ideas of the good, the beautiful, and the right. There are illusions and there are illusions. “We the People” as a description of a slave-holding society is an illusion that needs to be exposed; “We the People” as an aspiration that permitted, even encouraging, even worth fighting for, along with such illusions as natural right and human reason on which the concept relies. The ability to discern the difference between these two forms of illusion is what good education teaches. Such judgment can come neither from inculcating fixed canons nor from deconstructing all canons.

SUMMARY

I will now summarize the major findings of this chapter. I began by setting forth Bennett's major claims for the primacy and centrality of the study of Western culture in the curriculum. Bennett's claims are four-fold: [1] The curriculum should emphasize content. [2] During the 1960s and 1970s, educators lost their nerve and abandoned their traditional commitment to prescribing a core content. This unfortunately led to a mistaken emphasis on skills at the expense of teaching a core content. [3] The core content should feature the great works, principles, and values of Western civilization which comprise our common culture. The chief responsibility of educators is to transmit
this common culture to each new generation. [4] The curriculum is to be assessed by how well it transmits this core content, one important measure of which is student performance on content based proficiency exams.

I then set forth Bennett’s three lines of justification for the primacy and centrality of Western culture in the curriculum. He first argues that we should study the West because it is “our” culture. Those institutions which inform our conduct as a people are the product of Western civilization. Therefore, to understand and effectively function in our society, a knowledge of the Western intellectual legacy is necessary.

Secondly, Bennett argues that we should study, value, and defend Western Culture because it is “good,” or even, “the best.” He argues that: The historical achievements of the Western tradition can be judged to be better than the achievements of other cultures and traditions; Governments and societies grounded in Western principles and values produce better living conditions for their citizens; The West, and in particular the United States, have been looked to by the rest of the world for guidance and inspiration; The philosophical tradition of the West provides the most thoughtful answers to life’s grand questions, and stands as the epitome of reason and rational discourse.

Thirdly, Bennett argues that the West must be studied, defended, and valued because it is under attack. Bennett is primarily referring here to those liberal intellectuals and academics whose nefarious relativism and anti-Western bias--Bennett claims--poses a threat to our common culture and civilization. Therefore the intellectual tenets of Western civilization must be defended against such attacks.

Having set forth Bennett’s major claims, and his justifications for these claims, I then turned to a closer examination of these matters, as well as addressing criticisms of Bennett’s positions. I first examined Bennett’s claims on the role and status of content in the curriculum. I concluded that in his curriculum proposals, Bennett strikes an effective balance between content and skills. He recognizes that a general “working” knowledge of a specific content is a necessary condition for educational development. He does not argue that it is a sufficient condition, or that mastery of a specific content is an end in itself. Rather, he argues that a rudimentary knowledge of a basic content enables students to then exercise and develop their critical skills. That a rudimentary knowledge of a specific content is instrumental in promoting education, seems undeniable. However, this value is only achieved by a proper balance and integration of
such knowledge with the development of skills. Such pitfalls as "teaching to the test," and viewing knowledge of content as an end in itself, must be avoided.

I then examined Bennett's arguments for the content of the content. Namely, a content that emphasizes the Western intellectual tradition. I first considered Bennett's argument that a knowledge of the Western intellectual tradition (what Hirsch call "cultural literacy") is instrumentally valuable for effective participation in our society. I was in essential agreement with both Bennett and Hirsch that there are great benefits to having a working knowledge of our society's cultural heritage, and that it is a worthwhile pursuit for educators to cultivate such knowledge in students. However, I did discuss a qualification of this endorsement by arguing that Bennett's proposals often involve a failure to appreciate, understand, and respect America's cultural diversity.

For example, I contended that he often views the cultural differences of students as obstacles to overcome rather than as an educational resource to tap into. I criticized Bennett's unwarranted claims for the superiority and privileged status of Western culture. In his zeal to praise the primacy of the West, Bennett exudes a smugness which is unjustified and serves no educational purpose. In fact, his calls to defend the West constitute a conservative political agenda which precludes or diminishes the subversive, critical, and creative possibilities which make a study of the humanities worthwhile. He does not adequately attend to the demands of various cultural groups to be "heard on their own terms." Bennett's suggestions for the study of other cultures often seems an insignificant afterthought, or takes the form of token inclusion. Bennett fails to achieve an adequate balance between the study of Western culture and the study of other cultures. Such a balance is precluded by his insistence on attempting to demonstrate the intellectual, political, and moral superiority of the West.

I then turned to an examination of Bennett's posturing on the putative superiority of Western culture. I argued that Bennett's claims for the superiority of the West are specious. Indeed, the whole notion of engaging in a hierarchical ranking of the world's cultures and civilizations seems to be a dubious enterprise. According to Bennett, however, a refusal to make such judgments in tantamount to relativism. I argued that Bennett inaccurately characterizes relativism. Bennett suggests that if one embraces relativism, then she thereby abandons any philosophical grounding on which to make normative judgments. However, just because someone refuses to engage in
dubious hierarchical evaluations, or decisions of what is the “best,” or to base judgments on transcendent, abstract standards, this does not mean that one has abandoned the possibility—or desirability—of making judgments.

I briefly mentioned the efforts of Matthew Arnold as a historical precedent to Bennett’s calls for the defense of “our common culture” in the face of economic, political, and cultural changes and challenges. I also briefly commented on Alan Bloom’s views and their undemocratic tenor. Finally I suggested two promising pedagogical alternatives to Bennett’s proposals: Graff’s “teaching the conflicts” approach, and Benjamin Barber’s calls for community service and for reaching a balance between a naive reliance on tradition and the debilitating skepticism of postmodernism.
CHAPTER NOTES

18. For a discussion of Bennett's use of this metaphor and other metaphors commonly employed in the debates on curricular reform, see: Jeffrey Cinnamond, "Metaphors as Understanding," (ASHE Annual Meeting Paper, 1987), 35 pp.
22. Bennett, Our Children, p. 196.
23. Bennett, Our Children, p. 196.
24. Bennett, Our Children, p. 197.
25. Bennett, Our Children, p. 197.
27. Bennett, Our Children, p. 199.
29. Bennett, Our Children, p. 199.
30. Bennett, Our Children, p. 201.
34. Straughan, Can We Teach?, p. 41.


42. Other significant criticisms which are deserving of attention include the charge of "exclusionary testing," and the issue of which pedagogical methods best promote a mastery of content.


52. Some recent examples from the press are illustrative: One article begins, "Exactly what are they teaching in our schools these days? Apparently not civics. A national survey suggests that, on average, college graduates today know fewer selected basic facts about government and politics than college graduates in 1947." Richard Morin "Conventional wisdom: Facts and stats from the social sciences," *The Columbus Dispatch* (Feb. 25, 1996), p. 14-A. Another article begins: "More than half of America's high school seniors don't know basic facts about U.S. history, and they cannot use what they do know to reason or back up their opinions, a national report card indicates." One of the questions on the national test was on The Monroe Doctrine. "National Test: Student's history knowledge is lacking," *The Columbus Dispatch* (Nov. 2, 1995), p. A-10.

Columnist Dave Barry offers a humorous take on such tests and American students' ignorance of the Monroe Doctrine. He writes: "I hate to be a nag, but this is something like the 46,000th consecutive study showing that you young people are not cutting the academic mustard. Do you know how that makes us feel? It makes us feel great. We go around saying to ourselves: 'We may be fat and slow and achy and unhip
and have hair sprouting from our noses like June asparagus, but at least we know the basic facts about American history." Barry goes on to explain how students in his day answered 200-word essay questions on American history: "The Intent of the Monroe Doctrine--The Monroe Doctrine is, without a doubt, one of the most important and famous historical doctrines ever to be set forth in doctrine form. And yet, by the same token, we must ask ourselves: Why? What is the quality that sets this particular doctrine--the Monroe Doctrine--apart from all the others? There can be no question that the answer to this question is: the intent." And so on. I'm sure you get the picture. Dave Barry, "Monroe Doctrine? Sorry, it's classified," The Columbus Dispatch (Dec. 10, 1995) p. D-4.


53. I do not want to leave this matter without a brief discussion of the value of education. An example of a justificatory account of education is found in John Chambers' Achievement of Education. This is the text I use in the Philosophy of Education class I teach. Chambers first distinguishes education from training. He then defines education as "those activities which broaden cognitive perspective and promote rationality." Finally, he offers four lines of justification for the proposition "education is valuable." He argues that education: [1] is instrumentally valuable; [2] is intrinsically valuable; [3] is valuable because it promotes respect for persons; [4] can be justified by use of a Kantian transcendental justification. This involves the notion that in the very asking of a question of value (e.g., Why honesty?, Why rationality?, Why education?) we are presupposing the value of the object in question. Though I am not prepared to offer an informed critique of the transcendental justification, I would like to make one comment. It seems to me that all the transcendental justification demonstrates is that we value education, or honesty, or rationality. It does not demonstrate that these things are valuable.

I also have a problem with Chambers' claim that education in intrinsically valuable. As I will argue in the next chapter, the whole idea of intrinsic value is metaphysically and epistemologically dubious. Simply posing the question "what is it intrinsically valuable for?" seems to indicate the absurdity of the notion of intrinsic value. I always discuss the criticism of belief in intrinsic value with my classes. Someone in the class usually argues that human life is intrinsically valuable. This is the very issue which Bernard Rosen addresses in his unpublished paper, "The Worthlessness of Being," (1992). Rosen argues that life is not intrinsically valuable, but at the same time, intrinsic value is not necessary to generate a moral obligation to treat human life "right."

In light of the problems with the idea of intrinsic value, I would make the following suggestion. Rather than engage in the tautological argument (education is valuable because it is intrinsically valuable), perhaps this formulation is more appropriate: Even though education may at times have no evident and immediate practical application, it is still worth while to pursue. Both for personal gratification and satisfaction; and--to use the banking metaphor--education may seem of no value now, but when the proverbial "rainy day" arrives, it may come in handy.

I feel that Chambers and others who posit the intrinsic value of education, often do so out of the mistaken belief that this provides the ethical and metaphysical "clout" to justify the exercise of education. But such "clout" is philosophically suspect and unnecessary in practice. See: John Dewey, Theory of Valuation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939). I am of the opinion that the best candidate for intrinsic value (though not in a moral sense) is pleasure. I have been able to make a lot of "pedagogical hay" from this issue by referring to Nozick's essay on "The Experience Machine": in: Robert Nozick, Anarchy, State and Utopia (New York: Basic Books, 1974). I call it "the pleasure machine," and bring in a discussion of students' conceptions of the afterlife.
and the philosophical inconsistencies of such conceptions. I would like to write a paper on the inconsistencies and contradictions of 'heaven'.


55. Bennett addresses this issue in his essay “Readiness for Work, Readiness for Life.” He argues that education in the humanities can be of value even for those students in vocational education. I would respond that the enjoyment and value education in the humanities provides is strongly related to one’s economic and social conditions. Bennett’s arguments—in my opinion—suggest the use of the humanities to cultivate a docile work force loyal to employers. In other words, he does not pursue the subversive, creative, and critical possibilities which I think make study of the humanities worthwhile. See: Neil Postman & Charles Weingartner, Teaching as a Subversive Activity (New York: Delacorte Press, 1969).

56. Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade (Paramount, 1989).

57. Seven (Home Line Home Video, 1995).


60. Richard Pratte, Pluralism in Education: Conflict, Clarity and Commitment (Springfield: Charles C Thomas, 1979), pp. 60-85.


70. Fish, No Such Thing, p. 46.


72. Jonathan Kozol writes about the “detoxified,” “decontaminated,” and
"antiseptic" presentation of American historical figures such as Dr. King, Henry David Thoreau, and Helen Keller. According to Kozol, American history texts present these individuals in a way that strips their lives and work of its revolutionary and radical qualities. Kozol writes: "There is, by now, a sequence by which historic figures of strong radical intent are handled in the context of the public school. First, we drain the person of nine tenths of his real passion, guts and fervor. Then we glaze him over with implausible laudations. Next we place him on a lofty pedestal that fend off any notion of direct communion. Finally, we tell incredibly dull stories to portray his school-delineated but, by this point, utterly unpersuasive greatness." In: Kozol, The Night is Dark, pp. 96-97.


76. In his book The End of Education, William Spanos argues that educational reformers such as Matthew Arnold, Irving Babbitt, I. A. Richards, and William Bennett have operated from a "theologocentric" dualistic metaphysic which manifests itself in such phrases as "our culture," and "the best culture;" and also involves the positing of a disinterested detached vantage point from which a "magisterial we" make evaluations and judgments on cultural and curricular matters. Spanos discusses Michel Foucault's citing of Bentham's "panopticon" as an instantiation of this metaphysic in a "disciplinary society." William V. Spanos, The End of Education: Toward Posthumanism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).


78. For example, this passage in Luke 12: 47-48 is often cited: "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worth of a flogging, will receive but few. And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more" (NASB).


83. Fish, No Such Thing, p. 10.


88. Frank A. Moretti, "Who Controls the Canon? A Classicist in Conversation with Cultural Conservatives," *Teachers College Record* 95 (Fall, 1993), p. 113. For a rather creative critique of conservative proposals for a curricular reading list, see: Chris M. Anson, "Book Lists, Cultural Literacy, and the Stagnation of Discourse," *English Journal* 77 (Feb., 1988): 14-18. Anson writes: "When book lists try to perpetuate a cultural tradition centrally important to a certain group of people, they often ignore the culture in which the students themselves are immersed. One of our chief responsibilities as educators ought to be finding ways to inspire students to read in, write about, and understand a variety of "cultures"--their own included--as well as the traditions which the cultural literati want to force upon them by fiat. We should be building cultural bridges, not burning them down" (p. 18).


CHAPTER IV
VALUES AND MORAL EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will begin by offering a brief sketch of Bennett’s basic positions and arguments concerning moral education, or as Bennett labels his approach, “character education.” I will then consider Bennett’s criticisms of non-directive approaches to moral education, and discuss three non-directive approaches: “Values Clarification”; “moral reasoning”; and A. S. Neill’s Summerhill. I will then consider Bennett’s arguments for directive moral education. Consideration will then be given to the ethical and philosophical positions which guide Bennett’s views on moral education. Special attention will be given to questions of ethical theory. Though Bennett does not explicate any particular ethical theory, there are several foundational philosophical beliefs which pervade his discourse on moral education.

We will examine the philosophical basis for the following positions advanced by Bennett: First, is his belief in objective morality. According to Bennett, some things are really good or bad, really right or wrong in a moral sense. Second, though Bennett recognizes there are controversial moral issues, he maintains that there is a broad consensus on “the basics” of morality. Third, Bennett contends that an effective approach to moral education must be grounded in a commitment to basic moral principles. To address these three issues I will engage in a rather lengthy discussion of “amoralism,” and also Nel Noddings’ book Caring. I feel the lengthy discussion is warranted because these two approaches offer a significant challenge to each of Bennett’s three foundational beliefs, which I cited previously.

BASIC POSITIONS ON CHARACTER EDUCATION

In his essay, “The Three C’s,” Bennett argues for the educational priorities of content, character, and choice. We discussed the issue of content in the preceding chapter. Though I did not discuss Bennett’s views on school choice, Chapter Two did
involve an examination of the political context in which the debate over school choice has been framed. In the "Three C's" essay, Bennett also offers his standard arguments on the matter of character education. I will now briefly set forth the various arguments which Bennett makes. I will also indicate which of these arguments will receive closer examination in the remainder of the chapter.

Bennett first offers a definition of 'character', and states that character education has been a perennial concern for educators:

Americans have always believed that in education the development of intellect and character go hand in hand. What is character? My dictionary defines it as "strength of mind, individuality, independence, moral quality." We could, of course, include more: thoughtfulness, fidelity, kindness, honesty, respect for law, standards of right and wrong, diligence, fairness, and self-discipline. ¹

Throughout Bennett's discussions of moral education, the concepts 'values', 'character', and 'virtue', are used loosely and often interchangeably. If a distinction is to be made, the following distinctions might be helpful: 'Values', refer to those moral traits, principles, and characteristics which we as a society or culture value. For example, the traits of good character which Bennett lists, would be considered examples of "our moral values." When Bennett speaks of "family values," or "traditional values," or "Judeo-Christian values," he simply means those principles or standards which have been valued, defended, and prized by the various institutions, traditions, and contexts. I don't think Bennett suffers from a lack of clarity on this matter. He has been criticized, however, for his dubious contention that we can somehow find agreement upon, or justifiably identify a core set of values in any of these contexts. We will address this issue later, when we discuss the relation of moral theory to moral education. For now, let it be said that this roughly describes Bennett's use of 'values'. 'Virtues', on the other hand, refer to those traits of character and behavior in the moral sphere, which are valued. 'Character' refers primarily to the habitual instantiation of these abstract virtues in the conduct of an individual.

Having noted the perennial concern with character education in American schools, and having defined 'character', Bennett then proceeds to raise the question, "How is character taught?" He begins his answer to this question by offering some criticisms of several current approaches to moral education. He argues that in many cases, contemporary forms of moral education have abandoned traditional methods of cultivating character, and have become "over intellectualized." He writes:
But how can these qualities be taught? It seems many of our schools have forgotten the answer. In recent years, although we have not over intellectualized the curriculum, ironically we have tried to intellectualize moral development. Many have turned to a whole range of "values education" theories and practices where the goal is to guide children in developing their own values by discussion, dialogue, simulation, even games.²

Bennett is often critical of these "non-directive" approaches to moral education. By "non-directive," he means those approaches to moral education which do not explicitly teach, endorse, encourage, inculcate, or direct a student to adopt particular moral principles, but rather seek to develop the student's ability to make moral decisions on her own. Such non-directive approaches to moral education would include "values clarification," "situation ethics,"³ and "moral reasoning." We will discuss later these approaches to moral education, and Bennett's criticisms of them.

Bennett argues for a form of moral education in which character is cultivated through habit and example. This approach to moral education finds its roots in the writings of Aristotle.⁴ Bennett writes, "Aristotle knew, and psychologists confirm today, that it is habit which develops virtues, habit shaped not only by precept but by example as well. . . . It is by exposing our children to good character and inviting its imitation that we will transmit to them a moral foundation." Bennett notes the primary importance of parents in this task, but then he turns his attention to the role of professional educators in this regard:

First, teachers and principals must be willing to articulate ideals and convictions to students. As Oxford's Mary Warnock has written, "You cannot teach morality without being committed to morality yourself; and you cannot be committed to morality yourself without holding that some things are right and others wrong." Second, the character of a school, its ethos, is determined not only by the articulation of ideals and convictions, but by the behavior of authorities. We must have principals and teachers who know the difference between right and wrong, good and bad, and who themselves exemplify high moral purpose.⁵

Clearly, these claims about the manifest differences between right and wrong, and good and bad, involve certain ethical views and philosophical assumptions. I will later offer some criticisms of Bennett's views on this matter.

Just as Bennett argues for the importance of teachers acting as moral examples, so he argues that educators can find a wealth of illustrative moral examples in literature. He argues that these examples from literature should be employed by
teachers in their quest to develop morality and virtuous conduct on the part of students. Bennett's most extensive discussions of this matter are in the essay "Moral Literacy." \(^6\) and in The Book of Virtues. \(^7\) I will later offer some brief comments and criticisms of Bennett's views on this matter.

The final matter which Bennett alludes to in his "Three C's" essay concerns the role and status of religious values in moral education. In the essay, Bennett writes:

There is one specific initiative that should be mentioned. President Charles W. Elliot of Harvard once said that "in the campaign for character no auxiliaries are to be refused." Might not voluntary school prayer be an auxiliary to character? I believe it can be. In any case, I do not believe the federal government should decide, a priori, whether school prayer may or may not be allowed. I do not believe that voluntary prayer in school should be prohibited, as it is today. \(^8\)

For the remainder of the chapter I will address: Criticisms of non-directive moral education; Bennett's defense of directive moral education; Ethical theory and moral education, particularly the challenge of "amoralism" to Bennett's beliefs in objective morality, which guide his views of moral education; And, applied ethics and amoralism. Finally, I will consider the program of moral education presented in Nel Noddings' Caring. I will give special attention to her criticisms of traditional conceptions of morality and moral reasoning.

**CRITICISMS OF NON-DIRECTIVE MORAL EDUCATION**

On many occasions, Bennett has argued that non-directive approaches to moral education are philosophically and pedagogically flawed. He contends that such approaches are relativistic. He claims that they fail to provide students with needed moral guidance, and as a result are often ineffective in cultivating good character in students. In his book Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong: And What We Can Do About It. \(^9\) William Kilpatrick offers a detailed critique of non-directive approaches to moral education. Kilpatrick's views on moral education are very similar to Bennett's, but Kilpatrick offers a more detailed treatment of the matter than does Bennett. The title of Kilpatrick's book is taken from Rudolf Flesch's 1955 book, Why Johnny Can't Read. In that work, Flesch argued that the "look-say" method of teaching reading was a flawed approach, which was primarily to blame for growing inadequacies in student literacy. \(^10\) This title was also used by Morris Kline in his 1973 book, Why Johnny Can't Add: The
Failure of the New Math. Kline argued that the “new math” approach was flawed because it stressed a conceptual or philosophical understanding of mathematics, at the expense of teaching students how to do basic mathematical computations and operations. As a result, the “new math” approach was blamed for Johnny’s lack of proficiency in math. In a similar vein, Kilpatrick blames Johnny’s inability to tell right from wrong on the reigning non-directive theories and methods of moral education. Kilpatrick offers a historical survey of the major non-directive approaches in a chapter of the book titled “How Not to Teach Morality.” Let us now briefly consider what some of these approaches involve.

Kilpatrick notes that the transmission of cultural and moral values had been, historically, the preeminent function of American education. As does Bennett, Kilpatrick claims that these traditional approaches to moral education were abandoned en masse during the 1960s. Kilpatrick also claims that the social upheavals of the era (the King and Kennedy assassinations, the Vietnam war, the civil rights movement, Watergate, among others), led many educators to the view that “the culture was something to be ashamed of, not transmitted.” This, according to Kilpatrick, contributed to the widespread embrace of new approaches to moral education:

This was the atmosphere into which the so-called decision-making model of moral education emerged. It was a model that relied on students to discover values for themselves, and it promised that this could be done without indoctrination of any sort. Students would be given tools for making decisions, but the decisions would be their own. The idea gained ready acceptance in schools. Decision making was exactly what educators were looking for, and they rushed to embrace it.

Values Clarification and Moral Reasoning

According to Kilpatrick, “the decision-making model developed along two different lines. One approach, called ‘Values Clarification,’ emphasized feelings, personal growth, and a totally non-judgmental attitude; the other, known as the ‘moral reasoning’ approach, emphasized a ‘critical thinking’ or cognitive approach to decision making.” Values clarification is explicated in a number of books, including: Values and Teaching (1966), by Louis Raths. Merrill Harmin. and Sidney Simon; Values Clarification: A Handbook of Practical Strategies For Teachers and Students (1972), by Sidney Simon, Leland Howe, and Howard Kirschbaum; and Readings in Values Clarification (1973).
According to the Values Clarification Handbook, this approach to moral education is:

Designed to engage students and teachers in the active formulation and examination of values, this book is unique in content and format. It does not teach a particular set of values. There is no sermonizing or moralizing. The goal is to involve students in practical experiences, making them aware of their own feelings, their own ideas, their own beliefs, so that the choices and decisions they make are conscious and deliberate, based on their own value systems.

The book offers seventy-nine classroom exercises, or strategies, which are designed to help students develop their own value system, and an awareness of the values they do hold. The authors suggest that the exercises be employed either in a time specifically devoted to values clarification, or incorporated into the existing subject areas.

Kilpatrick offers the standard criticisms of the values clarification approach. Namely, that the approach views moral values as relative, and that the approach is actually concerned with students' preferences rather than moral values. Values, Kilpatrick claims, become matters of personal taste. Values are reduced to "what you love to do. It is not an ought-to but a want-to." Others have criticized values clarification for similar reasons. The second strand of the decision making approach to moral education which Kilpatrick discusses is the "moral reasoning" approach, which is primarily associated with the work of Lawrence Kohlberg. At first glance, the moral reasoning approach appears to avoid the "anti-intellectual bias" of values clarification. However, Kilpatrick argues that the moral reasoning approach to moral education has some serious flaws.

Kohlberg's approach to moral education draws heavily from the tradition of Socratic dialogue. Kohlberg advocated employing the Socratic method of elenchus to involve students in the discussion of moral dilemmas. Thereby, Kohlberg argued, ideas could be drawn from students, and the students' moral reasoning could develop, without moralizing, or without the imposition of values by the teacher. A key tenet, then, of Kohlberg's theory of moral education is that it is possible to accelerate and foster a student's moral development by engaging the student in the discussion of moral dilemmas. Underlying Kohlberg's theory of moral education was his psychological theory of moral development. Kohlberg held that individuals progress through a set pattern of
"stages" in which one's reasoning about moral situations becomes more complex and conventional. These stages were derived and elucidated by Kohlberg's analyses of people's response to a variety of hypothetical moral dilemmas.

Allow me to briefly mention a few criticisms which have been made of Kohlberg's views on moral education. Roger Straughan notes the controversial assumptions which are central to Kohlberg's psychological and moral theory. Namely, that the stage theory is correct, and that reasoning distinguishes the stages and is the central feature of moral education.21 A former colleague of Kohlberg's at Harvard, Carol Gilligan, argues in her book *In A Different Voice* (1982), that Kohlberg's theory fails to adequately account for differences in gender in assessing a students's response to moral dilemmas.22 Gilligan contends that females were often found wanting in their response to Kohlberg's use of moral dilemmas, because the moral judgment tests were biased in favor of boys. "Gilligan proposed that females had a separate and equally valid way of arriving at moral decisions. For females moral questions were approached from an orientation to caring and relationships rather than (as for males) an orientation to abstract principles of justice."23

Another criticism of Kohlberg involves the "gappiness" of moral education. This criticism has also been leveled at many other approaches to moral education. The issue of the "gap" in moral education refers to the fact that students may perform well on tests used to assess their knowledge of morality, yet fail to behave in a way that is consistent with their moral beliefs. In short, then, the "gap" refers to the disparity between one's knowledge about morality and one's moral behavior. Educators, philosophers, and theologians have attempted to explain this disparity in several ways. One of the common explanations of the gap in morality involves the issue of *volition, or the will.*24 Pauline theology is replete with teachings aimed at explaining this gap, as well as exhortations to Christians on how to overcome the gap. For instance, Paul uses the old *man-new man* metaphor, the *spirit warring against the flesh* metaphor, as well as explaining the struggle to live out one's moral convictions as a fight against the forces of Evil. Perhaps the Apostle's clearest expression of the gappiness of morality is in the autobiographical passage found in the Epistle to The Romans: "For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish" (7:19).
Clearly, any credible approach to moral education must come to grips with this matter of gappiness. Of course, no approach can "guarantee" success. However, in assessing various approaches to moral education, an important consideration would no doubt be, the degree to which students do or do not behave morally (although the issue of how "moral behavior" might be determined, assessed, and related to a particular approach to moral education is certainly complex, involved, and perhaps ultimately illusory). At any rate, any self-respecting moral educator should be prepared to give an account of how her approach to moral education addresses the issue of, and contributes to the development of students' actual behavior. As William Kilpatrick notes, "The hard part of morality, in short, is not knowing what is right but doing it."25

Kohlberg's approach, then, has been criticized for emphasizing moral reasoning and moral knowledge, at the expense of attention to cultivating moral behavior on the part of students. According to some critics, Kohlberg's reliance on moral dilemmas in moral education is flawed, because the hypothetical dilemmas employed bear little relation to the concrete, everyday situations in which moral decisions are actually made. "The danger in focusing on problematic dilemmas such as these is that a student may begin to think that all of morality is similarly problematic. After being faced with quandary after quandary of the type that would stump Middle East negotiators, students will conclude that right and wrong are anybody's guess."26 Thus, Kilpatrick argues that "classroom time might be better spent in talking about the virtues of friendship, loyalty, and honesty, and how to practice them, rather than in dredging up situations where honesty might not be the best policy or where loyalty and honesty conflict or even where cannibalism might be a legitimate course of action."

Kilpatrick notes that the use of moral dilemmas can be an effective pedagogical method for older students, but that as a first line of moral education, Kohlberg's approach is inappropriate. Kilpatrick writes, "Debunking moral values before they are learned is not a good policy. Before students begin to think about the qualifications, exceptions, and fine points that surround difficult cases they will seldom or never face, they need to build the kind of character that will allow them to act well in the very clear-cut situations they face daily. The basics ought to come first."27 This same point is made on several occasions by Bennett. For example, Bennett makes the following argument in his essay "Moral Literacy and the Formation of Character":

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I have not mentioned issues like nuclear war, abortion, creationism, or euthanasia. This may come as a disappointment to some people, but the fact is that the formation of character in young people is educationally a different task from, and a prior task to, the discussion of the great, difficult controversies of the day. First things first. We should teach values the same way we teach other things: one step at a time. We should not use the fact that there are indeed many difficult and controversial moral questions as an argument against basic instruction in the subject. We do not argue against teaching physics because laser physics is difficult, against teaching biology or chemistry because gene splicing and cloning are complex and controversial, against teaching American history because there are heated disputes about the Founders' intent. Every field has its complexities and controversies. And every field has its basics.28

Kilpatrick likens the pedagogical effects of a skilled teacher employing moral dilemmas to the effects of a roller coaster ride. The effects can be both exhilarating and disorienting. Though the exercises with moral dilemmas may leave the student "breathless," and cognitively stimulated, such exercises can also be confusing to the student because--as Kilpatrick contends--the "dilemma approach leaves a boy or girl no objective criteria for deciding right and wrong."29 The question I would like to pose to Kilpatrick and Bennett on this matter is, "But what are the objective criteria for deciding right and wrong, good and bad?" I will discuss this matter shortly, when I consider Bennett's views in regard to ethical theory. For now, I would like to mention that Kilpatrick does briefly chronicle some cases where Kohlberg's educational theory has been put into practice; often with disastrous results. The most notable case involves the Cluster School which Kohlberg founded in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1974. In the first five years of operation, the school experienced "serious problems with drugs, theft, sex, and racial division."30 The failures of this educational experiment led Kohlberg to recant and revise some of his views on moral education. Kilpatrick quotes statements made by Kohlberg in a 1978 issue of The Humanist:

Some years of active involvement with the practice of moral education at Cluster School has led me to realize that my notion was mistaken...the educator must be a socializer teaching value content and behavior, and not only a Socratic or Rogerian process-facilitator of development...I no longer hold these negative views of indoctrinative moral education and I believe that the concepts guiding moral education must be partly "indoctrinative." This is true, by necessity, in a world in which children engage in stealing, cheating and aggression.31

Kohlberg's comments suggest the simple recognition that when teaching in a school context, rules need to be established and enforced. At the same time, however, I
realize that *which* rules are prescribed, and *how* they are enforced, are matters of contention. When prescribing rules, principles, or directives, the reflective teacher will give attention to the delicate balances between student freedom and classroom order, discipline and student autonomy. The rules prescribed should always be open to revision and assessment based on how well they contribute to the achievement of such educational goals as empowering, informing, encouraging, and equipping students to engage in an enlightened pursuit of the good life. In other words, there are compelling reasons for a *directive* approach to education. A key philosophical tenet of many of the non-directive approaches, however, is the belief that—for the most part—the imposition of rules or moral principles upon students is objectionable. These educators argue that any such imposition (without at least the express consent of the student) constitutes indoctrination, coercion, propaganda, moralizing, or preaching.

**Summerhill and The Imposition of Values**

The views of such educators are in most cases derived from a Rousseauian or Romantic view of the nature of the child. A view which posits the innate goodness of the child, and maintains a serious resistance to the imposition of any rule or principle which might violate a student’s freedom. This view underlies both the values clarification and moral reasoning approaches to moral education. During the 1960s and 70s, this non-directive philosophy gained currency among educators, as can be seen in various degrees in the writings of John Holt, Paul Goodman, Herbert Kohl, George Leonard, Jules Henry, Jonathan Kozol, Edgar Friedenberg, and Carl Rogers. Perhaps the most famous experiment in non-directive education is A.S. Neill’s Summerhill school. Neill founded (1921) and directed (pun intended) the school, which was located in Suffolk, England. The workings of the school and Neill’s educational philosophy were set forth in the 1960 book *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing.* Neill’s ideas served as an impetus and guide to like-minded educators in the United States, some of whom founded “free schools.”

To flesh out the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of these non-directive approaches, allow me to turn briefly to Elliot Eisner’s book, *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs.* In this book, Eisner discusses five basic orientations to the curriculum. According to Eisner, the designation and description of these orientations functions “to make vivid the major ways in which
individuals think about the aims and content of the curriculum, the role that teachers should play in schools, and the criteria that should be applied to assess the quality of schooling. The theoretical orientation associated with Summerhill and similar schools, is called the "personal relevance" orientation. In Eisner's account, the personal relevance orientation "emphasizes the primacy of personal meaning and the school's responsibility to develop programs that make such meaning possible. In operational terms, this requires that teachers develop educational programs in concert with students rather than from a mandate handed down from the staff of a central office who don't know the child." Or, as Neill argues, the goal is "to make the school fit the child, instead of making the child fit the school."

As we noted earlier, the personal relevance orientation is steeped in the Romantic philosophical tradition, particularly in its view of the nature of the child. Childhood is idealized and the inherent goodness of the child is a basic tenet. Children are regarded as naturally curious, full of potential, and brimming with interest in life. Each student's idiosyncrasies are to be acknowledged and allowed to develop. Thus, the matter of freedom is of paramount importance in the formulation of the personal relevance orientation. Teachers should seek to create an environment in which students are free to pursue their interests and develop their unique potentials; free from coercion, imposition, and manipulation by teachers. In many ways, the personal relevance orientation was a reactionary movement against what adherents claimed were the rigid disciplinary structures and deadening effects of traditional formal approaches to schooling. Allen Graubard comments on the reactionary dimension of the movement in his book Free The Children: Radical Reform and the Free School Movement:

Testing, framing, seating arrangements according to the teacher's convenience, predigested textbooks, public address systems, guarded corridors and closed rooms, attendance records, punishments, truant officers—all this belongs to an environment of coercion and control. Such an environment has not consulted the needs of normal growth, or the special needs of those whose growth has already been impaired.

In contrast to this rigid formalism, Neill proposed that teachers aim to create an environment in which the student is free to develop her particular talents and pursue her individual interests. The teacher is not an authority figure, but rather is on equal terms with the student, both owed mutual respect. The organization of the curriculum
is not formal, rigid, or content based. Neill advocates no particular method of teaching: “We have no new methods of teaching, because we do not consider that teaching in itself matters very much. Whether a school has or has not a special method for teaching long division is of no significance, for long division is of no importance except to those who want to learn it. And the child who wants to learn long division will learn it no matter how it is taught.”38

In regard to how students learn, Neill again stresses the importance of student freedom. Neill argues that students learn what they are interested in learning. The student is best able to determine what her individual needs and interests are, and thus she should be provided with the freedom to pursue these interests. In response to those who might argue that a child is not able to determine what is in her best interest to learn, Neill states:

The function of the child is to live his own life—not the life that his anxious parents think he should live, nor a life according to the purpose of the educator who thinks he knows what is best. All this interference and guidance on the part of adults only produces a generation of robots. You cannot make children learn music or anything else without to some degree converting them into will-less adults.39

In his book Freedom and Beyond, John Holt expresses similar sentiments: “The child is curious. He wants to make sense out of things, find out how things work, gain competence and control over himself and his environment, do what he can see other people doing. He is open, receptive, and perceptive. What is essential is to realize that children learn independently, not in bunches; that they learn out of interest and curiosity.”40

It is not my intention here, to thoroughly assess the ideas of Neill and other non-directive educators. Rather, I have attempted to briefly discuss examples of some of the non-directive approaches to education which Bennett is critical of. I concur with Bennett’s criticisms in at least one respect. Namely, in his contention that prescribing rules, principles, dictates, orders, guidelines, or standards of behavior is not inherently objectionable or pedagogically suspect.

Of course there are cases of directive education which might justifiably be charged as indoctrinative. Therefore, the issue is not a matter of “rules or no rules,” but rather, as I stated earlier, the issue is “which rules and for what reasons.” The imposition of rules is not prima facie objectionable, and there are many cases where the
imposition of rules is necessary to achieve the goal of educating students. We see this realization in the later writings of Kohlberg. Philosopher of education, John Chambers has discussed this matter in regard to what has been called "the paradox of freedom." The paradox is that "it is usually necessary to have some restraints on all so that there can be some measure of freedom for all."\textsuperscript{42} Chambers contends that "a strong case can be made that it is wise for a liberal-democratic society to impose constraints on children now, so that later in their lives children will be able to exercise wider choice among activities, and so that they will become educated and disciplined, and develop as persons."\textsuperscript{43}

Another way this matter has been addressed concerns the so-called "paradox of moral education." The paradox is that in the quest to develop a child’s ability to make independent moral judgments, it is often necessary to impose principles of conduct on the child; principles which the child may not, at the time, understand, or rationally consent to. Philosopher of education Cornell Hamm writes:

Before children reach the age of reason, they must act and behave on the basis of less than understanding of these principles. Necessarily habits of behavior are formed early in life. Because it is thought that habitual behavior militates against reasoned behavior there is in moral education, as well as in other areas of education, a paradox; the pedagogy employed seems to be at odds with the ideals aimed at.\textsuperscript{44}

Hamm concludes his discussion of the paradox as follows:

There is, however, no real contradiction here: there is only a pedagogical problem that is best solved by ensuring that the low-level rules children learn, and the habits they form on the basis of them, are actually reasonable moral rules and habits. If that is so, then habit will not militate against reason; and one can confidently teach low-level content without fear of charges of illegitimate conditioning and indoctrination. Moral education can then be genuinely so called.\textsuperscript{45}

\section*{Defense of Directive Moral Education}

Bennett’s most thorough treatment of this matter is the article he co-authored with George Sher, "Moral Education and Indoctrination." In the Literature Review I set out the main lines of argumentation in this article. For now, let me repeat that in this piece Sher and Bennett argue that an adequate approach to moral education "must include both directive and discursive elements." They also defend directive moral
education against charges that it "(1) violates a student’s autonomy, and (2) involves sectarian teaching inappropriate to a pluralistic society." They argue that if these claims can "be shown to lack substance, then the charge of indoctrination will carry little weight." 46 In his review of the article, James Rachels agrees with the argument that directive moral education is appropriate in schooling. Rachels writes:

Sher and Bennett discuss the view that there should be no directive moral education in public schools. Taken at face value, this is a perfectly silly view. It would, for example, forbid teachers from insisting that students not cheat, and it would forbid teachers from requiring that students work cooperatively on group projects. Sher and Bennett endorse directive moral education: if they mean to be endorsing no more than this, they are surely right. 47

Rachels qualifies this endorsement, though, by noting that oftentimes, directive moral education “can be much more overt.” Moreover, Rachels contends that the teaching of values in school is “the inevitable by-product of classes in ordinary subjects such as arithmetic and literature.” Therefore, courses designed specifically to inculcate moral values are superfluous and offer a context wherein the “teacher’s sectarian opinions about religion, economics, sex, and politics will inevitably intrude.” I do not fully concur with Rachels optimism in regard to the sufficiency of classes in ordinary subjects to carry out the task of moral education, nor do I fully agree with his rejection of courses concerned specifically with moral education. I do, however, agree with his conclusion that the issue is not whether to have rules, but rather what shall be the criteria used to decide which rules to impose. Rachels writes: “It is inevitable, however, that at least some substantive principles will be promoted. It is an interesting question how to distinguish those which should be inculcated from those which should not.” 48

Rachels suggests that:

There are some principles that must be accepted if society is to exist. The presumption in favor of truth telling is an example; without this rule, communication could not take place. The rule forbidding us from hurting one another is another example; we could not live together without such a rule. Since public schools are instruments of society, it may be fitting to limit the principles taught there to those which are necessary for social living. 49

There are several weaknesses to Rachels account here. First of which is his failure to distinguish between having a societal rule prohibiting lying or violence, and the actual incidents of lying or doing harm to others. In other words, I do not think
that principles prohibiting violence are necessary for society’s existence, nor that rules against lying are a necessary condition for communication to take place. However, the well-being of society or the quality of communication would no doubt be diminished to the degree that violent acts and duplicitous speech occur. At the same time, rules against violence and lying do not ensure that these acts won’t occur. Moreover, Rachels’ suggestion that we teach only those moral principles which are “necessary for social living,” simply begs the question of “what are the necessary principles?” His criteria therefore offers us little guidance in determining which principles are acceptable to teach in the schools.

Let us now examine the criteria suggested by Sher and Bennett for deciding which moral principles are acceptable to teach in public schools. They raise the question, “why are some forms of directive moral education permissible but others not?” In response they offer the following suggestions:

This question is too large for us to answer fully, but some considerations are obviously relevant. To warrant directive teaching, a moral principle must first be clearly and firmly grounded. In addition, it should be simple enough to be comprehended at an early developmental stage, general enough to apply in a variety of situations, and central rather than peripheral to our moral corpus. To be acceptable as a method of directive teaching, a practice must neither impair a child’s later ability to respond to moral reasons nor violate his rights. In many instances, the satisfaction of these requirements is undisputed. However, if an otherwise eligible principle or method is unacceptable to a conscientious minority, then respect for that minority may itself dictate restraint in directive teaching.

They then attempt to further explicate these criteria in regard to a consideration of the charge that such directive moral education might serve to promote the political, economic, and social status quo. They argue that this need not be the case. But they also consider whether in some cases it might be appropriate for teachers to inculcate moral principles which do have the effect of favoring the status quo. They conclude that “directive teaching of principles favoring existing institutions [even if controversial] cannot be ruled out.” I won’t offer a thorough examination of these suggested criteria at this point. However, a good case can be made that Bennett’s suggestions for including the teaching of religious values in schools (as illustrated in The Book of Virtues’ chapter on Faith), constitutes indoctrination, and that in some cases fails to meet his own criteria for what counts as an acceptable moral principle to be taught. I will now discuss the issue of moral education and ethical theory. For example, Bennett’s claim that “to warrant directive teaching, a moral principle must first be clearly and firmly
grounded," raises philosophical questions about the grounding of any moral principle, as does Bennett's insistence on the manifest clarity of "the basics" of good and bad, right and wrong. It is to these matters that I now turn.

**MORAL EDUCATION AND ETHICAL THEORY**

A recent news clip from *The Columbus Dispatch* reported that while Bennett was speaking at a prestigious high school in Bethesda, Maryland, someone spray-painted his car. The graffiti included such slogans as "Morality is a matter of taste." The school's principal told *The Washington Post* he suspected his students because "all the words were spelled correctly" (April 2, 1996). Though the vandal's act was illegal, and some people might claim, immoral, I feel the writer of the graffiti brings an important charge against Bennett's views on morality. What if morality is just a matter of taste or preference? Perhaps morality is simply a dubious social convention which has outlived its usefulness. Such questions and claims are anathema to Bennett's views on morality. He takes the idea of morality seriously. We see this in his repeated criticisms of moral relativism. Recall that in the last chapter, I argued that Bennett's characterization of aesthetic relativism was inaccurate. He mistakenly equated the position that aesthetic judgments are relative to the particular context, with the position that all works of art or literature are of equal merit. Bennett's views on moral relativism are similarly flawed and unsophisticated. He equates moral relativism with a position of "anything goes," or "morality is just a matter of taste." However, in so doing, Bennett ignores an important component of the ethical theory of the moral relativist. Namely, that while the relativist holds that morals are relative to the context, she also holds that there are binding moral principles which do apply to that context. For example, the survey philosophy text *Ethical Theory: Classical and Contemporary Readings,* includes several sophisticated defenses of moral relativism: "A Defense of Ethical Relativism," by Ruth Benedict; "Moral Relativism Defended," by Gilbert Harman; and "Moral Realism Defended," by David Brink.51

I doubt, however, If these accounts of moral relativism would be philosophically palatable for Bennett. Bennett contends that there are some moral principles, virtues, and values, which transcend particular contexts and cultures. According to Bennett, if there are no transcendent binding moral principles then we as a society lack sufficient
moral grounding and guidance for making moral judgments, or for cultivating virtuous conduct through education. As we noted earlier, Bennett admits that there are many controversial ethical issues, but he also contends there is significant agreement on the basics of morality. However, in my study of the philosophical discussions about ethical theory, no such consensus emerges. This lack of consensus in the study of ethics is illustrated in the article "Toward Fin de siecle Ethics: Some Trends," by Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton. The article appears in a special centennial issue of the journal The Philosophical Review. In this issue, several philosophers offer an account of the current state and recent history of their particular branch of philosophy.52

The authors of the article on ethics introduce the piece by commenting on the watershed work by G.E. Moore, Principia Ethica (1903).53 In this book, Moore put forth his famous "open question" argument.

Moore wants to say that the question "Is this N thing good?" where N stands for any 'natural property' (e.g., pleasure) is always open (e.g., the question is pleasure good? Is open in a way the question is pleasure pleasant? Is not). He believes that this shows that any naturalistic definition of 'good' will always be incorrect. He says that any philosopher who uses definitions to identify goodness with any natural property is committing the 'Naturalistic Fallacy'.54

Moore argued that goodness was an indefinable, non-natural property that is apprehended and discovered by intuition. Moreover, Moore's theory of obligation claimed that it was right (or even obligatory) to produce goodness. Moore explains: "What I wish first to point out is that 'right' does and can mean nothing but 'cause of a good result,' and it is thus identical with 'useful'; whence it follows that the end always will justify the means, and that no action which is not justified by its results can be right."55

But Moore's view of obligation has been criticized for equating 'right' with 'useful', thereby failing to meet the requirements of his own open question argument. Richard Garner puts it this way:

Moore's view of 'right' has the strange consequence of making utilitarianism true by definition, a procedure to which there are plenty of objections. Moore was not the first moralist to try to make it true by definition that the end justifies the means, but perhaps he should have asked himself his own question. "That is useful, but is it right?" seems to be the kind of question a sensible moralist would want to be open, but if we accept Moore's definition, it is not.56
The authors of the article in *The Philosophical Review* likewise dismiss much of Moore's ethical theory and its grounding in a primitive view of language. They write:

'It has been known for the last fifty years that Moore discovered no fallacy at all. Moreover, Moore's accident-prone deployment of his famous 'open question argument' in defending his claims made appeal to a now defunct intuitionistic Platonism, and involved assumptions about the transparency of concepts and obviousness of analytic truth that were seen (eventually, by Moore himself) to lead inescapably to the 'paradox of analysis'.

Yet, at the same time, Moore's influence on the philosophical discussion of ethical theory is acknowledged: "Why, then, isn't Moore's argument a mere period piece? However readily we now reject as antiquated his views in semantics and epistemology, it seems impossible to deny that Moore was on to something." One of the things Moore was "on to," was the difficulty involved in coming to some philosophical agreement about basic issues of value and obligation. Bennett is surely not alone when he claims that students should be taught the basics of morality, the difference between good and bad, right and wrong. But as the survey of recent work in ethical theory demonstrates, there is little agreement on these basic distinctions among philosophers. Perhaps this is due to the philosophical community's obsession with minutia and arguments on subtle detail. Perhaps this lack of consensus on morality among philosophers is due to the fact that the study of ethical theory bears little relation to the actual practice of moral conduct. Philosophers are so immersed in arcane theoretical debates that they may have lost touch with the common moral sensibilities possessed by the average Joe. This seems to be Bennett's view. He writes:

My experience as a former member of several philosophy departments has taught me that the prolonged study of ethics does not by itself make you a better person. It it did, philosophy professors would in general be better people than average. But they aren't. Yes, a few are better than average, but many others are worse. And the latter, thanks to their study, are more clever at achieving their ends. Being clever at ethics doesn't make you a good, decent, or responsible human being. It only makes you clever.

On the other hand, maybe the disagreements on morality are due to the elusive nature of the subject in question. Perhaps the spray painting vandal was on to something when he wrote that "Morality is a matter of taste." Several philosophers have argued that this is the case. For example, Richard Garner begins his essay "Amoralism," with three quotes from philosophers who view morality as being a dubious convention. Here are the quotes, from Nietzsche, Hobbes, and The Buddha:
Moral judgment belongs, as does religious judgment, to a level of ignorance at which even the concept of the real, the distinction between the real and the imaginary, is lacking. (Nietzsche)\textsuperscript{60}

But whatsoever is the object of any man’s appetite or desire, that is it which he for his part calls good; and the object of his hate and aversion, evil; and of his contempt, vile and inconsiderable. For these words of good, evil, and contemptible are ever used with relation to the person that uses them, there being nothing simply and absolutely so, nor any common rule of good and evil to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves. . . . (Hobbes)\textsuperscript{61}

Subhuti, though we speak of ‘goodness’ the Tathagata [Buddha] declares that there is no goodness, such is merely a name. (The Buddha, The Diamond Sutra, Section 23, in Price and Wong, 1969)

**AMORALISM AND ETHICAL THEORY**

In the essays "Amoralism," and "On the Genuine Queerness of Moral Properties And Facts,"\textsuperscript{62} and in the book Beyond Morality, Richard Garner offers what I take to be a compelling case against morality, and a promising account of amoralism, or as it is sometimes called, "anti-realism." Among the important claims made in Garner’s work are: Beliefs and ideas about morality are founded upon such dubious philosophical notions as objective goodness and badness, and objective prescriptivity: Morality is a “convenient fiction, a noble lie, a paternalistic deception”; A philosophical argument can be marshaled for almost any moral claim. Therefore, deception and sophistic rhetoric are the hallmarks of moralistic discourse: The amoralist may conduct her life in a manner others might consider moral, but such behavior on the amoralist’s part need not spring from considerations of morality: And finally, Garner “argues that a blend of compassion, non-duplicity, and clarity about the use and limits of language is more likely to produce a decent world than any secular or religious moral system ever devised.” Therefore, notions of morality and the vocabulary of moral discourse would best be discarded. I will now take a closer look at how Garner develops these themes.

I turn first to Garner’s critique of the philosophical foundations of morality. Moralists assume the existence of objective value and objectively binding moral principles. Moralists believe that Hitler’s acts were really bad, that lying is really wrong and telling the truth is right. Garner argues that the philosophical notions of intrinsic value and objective prescriptivity are metaphysically and epistemological suspect.
Garner labels these dubious philosophical beliefs as “crazy objectivity.” Garner also draws from J. L. Mackie’s work (Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong) on this matter. Mackie criticized the “queerness” of moral properties. Garner explains Mackie’s argument from queerness:

Mackie divides the argument from queerness into a metaphysical and an epistemological part. The metaphysical part says that objective values would have to be ‘entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe’, and the epistemological part says that our awareness of these strange qualities ‘would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else’. . . . Even without the queerness imported by objective prescriptivity, moral properties would present us with serious metaphysical and epistemological problems. But when we remember that a moral property is not inert, but ‘involves a call for action or for the refraining from action’, the queerness is compounded. How could any feature of something outside us make it the case that we are objectively required to do something?64

In an interesting twist on this matter, I would like to note that Mackie is a cognitivist. That is, he believes that we can know whether moral claims are true or false, and in every case they are false. Mackie and Garner argue that objective values and obligations are simply projections of individual and group preferences and desires. To think that values and obligations exist in the “fabric of reality,” is to commit what Mackie calls the “error theory.” Garner explains:

Obligations exist, but they are hypothetical and institutional. We value things, but not because we have discovered anything so peculiar as intrinsic value in them, and not because they meet intrinsic requirements. No matter how bound we feel, and no matter how bound others want us to be, we invent objective prescriptivity and intrinsic value and project them onto perfectly natural and intrinsically neutral items. The error pointed to in the ‘error theory’ is the error we make when we take our projections for independent features of what we are evaluating, or see our requirements, or the requirements of others, as lodged in reality itself. This error is made by all serious users of moral language; and even those who use it without making the error imply (to others) that they believe in objectively prescriptive moral facts or intrinsically evaluative properties.65

**OBJECTIONS TO AMORALISM**

I was first exposed to Garner’s views as a student in the Philosophy class Advanced Ethical Theory, which he taught. When we discussed Garner’s views in class, there seemed to be a fair amount of resistance to the position of amoralism. Much of
this resistance no doubt stemmed from the novelty and audacity of the amoralist’s claims, as well as the fact that concepts of morality pervade our thinking and education from the time we are young children. One objection to Garner’s position takes the form of a “quick-kill” argument, in which the critic argues that Garner is not really dispensing with morality per se, but is merely replacing perennial systems of morality with a brand of moralism based on the principles of compassion and non-duplicity. Thus, it is argued, Garner is a “closet moralist” who is misleading and inconsistent in his claim to have abandoned morality. As with most attempted quick-kill arguments, however, this one seems to involve a simplistic underestimation of the position in question. Clearly, Garner has considered reasons for distinguishing informed compassion from traditional conceptions of morality.

The argument that Garner is a moralist in amoralist’s clothing takes the following lines: Even the putative amoralist is faced with the prospect of making decisions on what courses of action he will take. When facing decisions in the ethical realm (defined provisionally as “those actions that affect others”) one decides what he should or should not do. In order to make these decisions we need a guide or standard to motivate us and to enable us to evaluate which course of action we should pursue. The principles we adopt to make these decisions in the moral realm, then, constitute our moral values and obligations. Therefore, when Garner suggests we cultivate informed compassion to help us evaluate courses of action and to motivate us, he is simply advocating a moral principle we should adopt.

Now, to a degree, Garner might agree with this scenario. However, he would no doubt also attempt to show that when the typical moralist invokes the term “moral principle” she is ascribing more significance to the term than that it is simply a motivating factor or a convenient tool for evaluating courses of action. Specifically, most moralists when pinned down, would claim that these moral principles are derived from the fact that some things are really good or bad, and there are some things we really ought or ought not to do. That is, they subscribe to the objective moral values and objective prescriptivity which Garner rejects.

Thus, when Garner advocates informed compassion, he is not claiming that there is any intrinsic goodness or binding oughtness to it, as most moralists would claim. Therefore, Garner cannot legitimately be said to be advocating an alternative morality, and he is most careful to avoid ascribing to ‘compassion’ the metaphysical baggage he
finds so objectionable in the usual conceptions of morality. What we may have, then, is an element of verbal dispute between Garner and his critics. Perhaps a closer examination of Garner’s writings would show the critic that what Garner is suggesting can legitimately be called “amoralism.” But even if this is recognized as a verbal dispute, the important substantive question remains: Does the amoralist’s suggestion that we abandon problematic moral concepts and adopt informed compassion present a reasonable course of action for teaching our children and in making ethical decisions?

In response to this question, critics of amoralism often raise the “Dostoevsky objection.” Dostoevsky wrote that “without God, all things are permissible.” This objection takes several forms. For example, Christian conservatives argue that without absolute moral standards on which to base and assess our individual and societal conduct, life would degenerate into a chaotic “anything goes” affair in which each person “does what is right in his own eyes.” Bennett argues that without binding and transcendent moral standards we would have no philosophical foundation on which to make ethical judgments, or to order our relations with others. Be it God, the scriptures, natural rights, objective value, the State, or the categorical imperative, moralists ultimately rely on some such notion to generate the metaphysical clout for the binding demands these authoritative sources make on our conduct. The connection between religion and moralism is no coincidence. Philosopher G.E.M Anscombe has argued that systems of morality, with their binding moral commands, find their origins in religion and to this day exhibit a theistic hangover.

Let me illustrate another way the Dostoevsky objection takes shape. I often have discussions with my dad on this matter. For example, I might claim “I don’t believe in God or morality. I think morality is a social fiction, and I am not bound by its demands.” To which he might respond: “Oh, that’s just fine. Well, if there is no objective right or wrong, then why don’t you just go out and rape and pillage. Hell, what Dahmer did wasn’t bad, or evil, he was just misunderstood!”

To begin with, I have no desire to “go out and rape and pillage.” But if I did have a strong desire to do this, I am not sure than any moral commandment is going to seriously thwart my desire to engage in mayhem. Witness those criminals who do engage in these activities. Secondly, if I were to engage in such conduct I would face the risk of legal sanction. As an amoralist (as I am in this illustration), I can recognize and
observe the law, even though I may not believe in the Law. That is, while I recognize the social necessity of adopting conventional systems of law, this does not mean that I subscribe to the proposition that the law derives its authority from some transcendent source, be it God, Nature, or the State. At one time or another, the amoralist, the relativist, and the atheist have each been characterized as having opened a Pandora's Box. By debunking notions of binding, absolute, transcendent moral standards, it is said that these parties have abandoned any guide for conduct, standard for judgment, or motivation for expressing moral disapproval. Garner comments on this matter:

We assume that any competent adult knows the difference between right and wrong. We also assume that there is a difference between right and wrong. This belief is so strong and so widespread that moral philosophers use sentences like Hitler was evil, it is wrong to incinerate cats, kick dogs, or knowingly and willingly torture innocents, as starting points, not conclusions, of their arguments. Nobody, they assume, could reasonably doubt any of these things. And yet there are amoralists, and a careful amoralist may prefer not to say that it is wrong to kick dogs or that Hitler was evil. Anyone who really believes that nothing is "really evil" has to believe that Hitler was "not really evil." The problem with saying this, and with saying that Hitler was "really not evil," is that in an environment where the normal (evaluative) use of 'evil' is in place, these ways of putting things can express a lack of disapproval of Hitler. The amoralist, who may disapprove of Hitler as much as anyone, just doesn't want to use the word 'evil' with its standard objectivist implications.68

Just as the amoralist can express disapproval of certain actions and still remain consistent with an anti-realist ethical theory, so the amoralist may conduct her life in a manner which others might judge to be the model of moral propriety. Garner explains:

There is a respect in which amoralists do subscribe to moral principles, and a more important respect in which they do not. The non-duplicitous amoralist subscribes to a principle (non-duplicity) moralists might call a moral principle. But amoralists who adhere to non-duplcity as a policy will not subscribe to that policy as moralist do, because they will not see it as objectively binding. Amoralists who allow their principles of action to be called "moral principles" run the risk of giving the impression that they subscribe to the moralist assumptions that lie behind their moralist way of talking. It makes more sense for an amoralist to resist the idea that the acknowledging only that others interpret it that way.69

For the same reasons, a teacher who is operating from an amoralist position can still justifiably impose, institute, and enforce rules and principles in the classroom. Students can be encouraged, prodded, and required to follow such rules as no smoking in the school building, don't do violence to one's classmates, and no cheating on tests. These rules can be imposed because there are good reasons for them (though these need not be moral reasons). Therefore, I can agree with Bennett's criticisms of non-directive
moral education—namely, that there may be compelling pedagogical and prudential reasons for teachers to engage in directive education—and yet still reject his ethical theory and its implementation in education. But at this point, we are entering into the realm of applied ethics.

**APPLIED ETHICS AND MORAL EDUCATION**

*Applied ethics* is often explained in distinction to *ethical theory*. Applied ethics involves the application of ethical theory to pressing ethical issues such as abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, economic distribution, sexual relations, the treatment of animals, and environmental concerns. University courses in applied ethics are often designed to address important ethical issues in particular professions. For example, courses in applied ethics for education, law, medicine, and politics are often offered. At The Ohio State University, the College of Education offers a course in Applied Ethics for Teachers. In recent years the book *The Ethics of Teaching*, by Kenneth A. Strike and Jonas F. Soltis, has been used as one of the texts for the course. The authors briefly sketch two approaches to thinking about ethics: consequentialist and nonconsequentialist ethical theories. They then suggest ways these ethical theories might be applied to ethical dilemmas and case studies of ethical disputes which teachers often face. They conclude that neither a consequentialist nor nonconsequentialist orientation is sufficient, but rather, a combination of the two approaches might best serve teachers in their quest to make ethical decisions.

Strike and Soltis suggest an approach to ethics called “reflective equilibrium.” This involves a process in which one’s moral intuitions and moral theory are modified and adjusted in response to one’s experiences and knowledge, until one’s moral intuitions and moral theory reach a point of consistency or equilibrium. The authors liken this process to the development of one’s understanding about language. We often have intuitions about the correct use of language, without knowing the formal principles of grammar. As an individual comes to understand the principles of grammar it often leads to a clarification and modification of our intuitions about language use. “Sometimes a deep understanding of the principles of language can lead us to revise our initial opinion about what is meaningful or correct. Understanding the principle can make an expression that seemed obscure or ambiguous clear and comprehensible, or it
can lead us to see the awkwardness or obscurity of something that had appeared clear and simple." Strike and Soltis maintain that a similar process occurs in the development of our thinking of ethical issues:

Likewise, a moral theory can change or overrule our intuitions about moral phenomena. Once we see more clearly what is assumed by our moral intuitions, we may wish to change them. Thus, there is an interaction between moral theory and moral intuition in ethical reflection, each influencing the other. The trick is to achieve some point of reflective equilibrium between our moral sense and our moral theory. By reflective equilibrium we mean reaching a point in our deliberations where we feel that our moral intuitions and the moral theory that accounts for them are satisfactorily consistent and where the decisions we reach and actions we take can be justified by our moral theory.73

In his book Beyond Morality, Richard Garner addresses the issue of applied ethics in a chapter titled "Applied Amoralism." Garner attributes the growing interest in applied ethics during the last few decades to increased public interest in ethical issues, the demand upon those who teach and write about moral philosophy for practical relevance, and the desire of many philosophers to avoid the "interminable squabbles" which have perennially pervaded discussions of ethical theory. Garner argues that on questions of applied ethics, "amoralists are in at least as good a position as anyone else to discuss these matters and give advice, they will not feel the need to take a stand on every real and imagined moral question. Moralists, however, who assume that moral questions do have right answers, seem to think that even very unlikely and totally imaginary cases merit extended discussions."74 Concerning the making of hard choices, and policy decisions, Garner puts it this way:

When amoralists are faced with genuine hard choices, they can make decisions at least as efficiently and intelligently as moralists. Like everyone else, they have sensitive decision-making skills and a reservoir of information. . . . Amoralists are fortunate to be in a position to think about these questions without the need to find the right answer, indeed, without the debilitating handicap of believing that there are right answers. Amoralists are not distracted from the actual details of a situation by the need to prove something or to remain within preestablished moral guidelines.75

Garner discusses how an amoralist might go about making decisions and judgments about such issues as crime and punishment, the death penalty, abortion, censorship, and the environment. His comments on crime and punishment are instructive concerning applied amoralism:

Amoralists are not anarchists. Even informed and compassionate amoralists will want laws to protect them and others from human
predators and to regulate important transactions. They will not say that
the state is morally justified in enforcing these laws, but they can support
the practice, given the entirely reasonable preference for living in a society
that restrains thieves and killers. Amoralists will not consider themselves
morally bound to follow the laws of their state or the conventions of their
society, but there is no reason to think they will conform to those laws
and conventions any less than moralists. If they lack a moral reason to
obey laws, they also lack a moral excuse for breaking them. 76

Though Garner does not specifically discuss how amoralism might be applied to
schooling, I think a consideration of the matter is certainly in order. In her book Caring:
A Feminine Approach to Ethics & Moral Education, Nel Noddings offers some promising
suggestions along these lines.77 Though Noddings does not--to my knowledge--embrace
or endorse the term "amoralism."78 her views bear several important similarities to
Garner's. For example: Both call into question ethical concepts such as 'rights',
intrinsic value, 'right' and 'wrong', and binding obligations; Both object to the practice
of attempting to apply abstract moral principles to make moral judgments in specific
cases; Both prefer to make decisions based on obtaining as much information about
specific cases as possible, rather than attempting to make decisions on the basis of some
ethical theory or moral calculus; Both argue that morality is often an insufficient
motivation to treat others compassionately, or to refrain from cruelty; Both lament the
intractable nature of most moral disputes and the practices of manipulation, sophistry,
and duplicity which often characterize moral discourse. Let us take a closer look at
Noddings' book. The following section draws heavily on a paper titled "Why Care About
Principled Ethics," which I wrote for a Seminar on Rationality.79

CARING, MORAL PRINCIPLES, AND MORAL EDUCATION

My interest in Noddings' book was sparked by comments I had heard in another
class. 80 It was said that certain feminist authors were engaging in polemics against
traditional conceptions of rationality. Since I am a student in a discipline where the
"powers that be" are said to bow down to the god of Rationality, I was intrigued by the
thought of feminist iconoclasts brazenly challenging this revered and hallowed concept.
After reading Noddings, I concluded that her attack was not against reason or logic per
se, but rather, much of her criticism was directed at the way in which abstract
principles, putatively derived by reason, were being foisted upon concrete situations
without due regard to the peculiarities of the cases at hand.

In this portion of the chapter I will not attempt to reconstruct Noddings' ethical theory, nor will I address the gender issues she raises. What I intend to do is examine a few of the criticisms she brings against traditional approaches to moral reasoning. It seems a fair question to ask at this point whether there is such a thing as "traditional moral reasoning," and if there is, has Noddings accurately characterized it. I will not attempt to answer these questions, but I will proceed from the supposition that the components of moral reasoning which she criticizes—and which we will consider—are typical of most Western ethical theories. These components include principles, rules, binding moral obligations, and moral designations such as "right" and "wrong." 81

Let us now examine some of Noddings' criticisms of moral principles and ethical theories. It has long been argued that one of the hallmarks of a rational ethical theory is that it is characterized by principles. Such a system involves principles of obligation which serve to guide one's ethical conduct, as well as providing a principled approach for evaluating the moral principles. Surely, one might argue, Noddings must grasp the importance and perhaps even the necessity of developing an ethical theory based on principles. Others might charge Noddings with inconsistency, by claiming that while she derides the role of a principle based ethic, she advocates an ethical system based on the principle of caring. Noddings anticipates such objections. Concerning her position, she writes: "Is such a view 'unprincipled'? If it is, it is boldly so; it is at least connected with the world as it is, at its best and at its worst, and it requires that we--in espousing a 'best'--stand ready to actualize that preferred condition." 82

The issue of whether or not Noddings is espousing a principled ethic is largely a conceptual matter which we can not fully resolve here. Recall, that we addressed this issue previously when we considered the charge that Garner was a "closet moralist" committed to the principles of compassion and non-duplicity. It is true that Noddings is committed to an ethic of care, and that she engages in developing suggestions for how this ethical ideal might be achieved. But it seems as though her commitments on these matters differ in important ways from the traditional approaches to morality of which she is so critical. Hence, the distinction she makes between her proposed ethic and traditional approaches seems legitimate, and charges of inconsistency made against her are unfounded.

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What Noddings objects to is the way traditional approaches to morality are based on principles which have been abstracted from human experience and then are universally applied to guide and evaluate ethical decisions. This mode of application often takes the form of a logical argument, a rational calculus, or a deductive proof. Each of which functions to "objectify" a situation, thus reducing ethical decisions to "problems to be solved." Noddings contends that such an approach detaches the ethical agent from the realities of personal relations, and inevitably leads to the elevation of principle over persons.

The charge that traditional ethics often promote principle over persons seems to be a powerful indictment of such systems. Images from history and literature spring to mind. Victor Hugo's novel Les Misérables focuses on the policeman Javert who relentlessly pursues Jean Valjean, discarding compassion and mercy in order to satisfy his compulsion to meet the letter of the law. In the Gospels, Jesus rebukes the religious leaders who were more concerned with maintaining the Sabbath regulations than in caring for the suffering of others. The annals of history are replete with examples of those who have committed great atrocities in the name of principle, be it obedience to divine command, allegiance to country, or for the cause of some ideal. Noddings notes that the conformance to moral principles is often motivated by an attempt to establish one's own moral propriety, and often at the expense of genuine caring for persons. She writes:

To spare ourselves guilt, we may prefer to define our caring in terms of conformity and/or regard to principle. If the other does not respond, we are still quite safe from criticism. We are righteous. We act in obedience to some great principle—I must defend my country! I must execute the law! I must be fair!—and from the potential cared-for we avert our eyes. We do not care for him any longer.

At this point, advocates of a principled ethic will likely object that Noddings has misrepresented their position by focusing on these extreme examples. They might argue that these cases are instances in which fanatics have misapplied a principle, or perhaps have misinterpreted the true intent of the principle by engaging in a zealous adherence to the "letter of the law." Some might contend that it is the particular principle of the systems cited which are problematic. Moreover, were a system of ethics to be based on person directed principles (e.g. respect for persons, promoting the happiness of others, agapism), then these problems would be avoided. There may be some substance to each
of these objections, and they may help to explain numerous cases in which abhorrent acts are committed in the name of principle. Noddings would also agree that an endorsement of a principled ethic does not in and of itself necessitate that individuals will act in ways that are deleterious to other persons.

Noddings would, however, still maintain (and I am inclined to agree with her) that the basic problem is not with the choice of principles, or their interpretation, but with the mistaken notion that abstract moral principles can serve as an obligatory guide to adjudicate ethical decisions in the same way the rules of logic can be appealed to in order to settle a logical dispute. And we are not just talking about differences in the degree of precision each area of study affords. When a system of ethics maintains that people are obligated or bound to comply with moral principles, this creates the theoretical framework for the elevation of principle over persons, and often results in behavior by individuals which may conform to principle, but often at the expense of care for others.

In response to this, the advocate of a traditional ethic might claim that his endorsement of principles does not entail the absolutist approach portrayed by Noddings. That is, he might contend that these principles are only guides for making ethical decisions, and that these principles might be modified, abandoned, or simply not complied with, give the exigencies of actual situations. Of course this contention once again raises the difficult conceptual question of whether such an approach should be considered a "principled ethic." It should be noted, though, that Noddings does acknowledge that there are occasions when moral principles might have some utility, and that the "one-caring" may appear to be acting on principles--While at the same time rejecting an ethic based on abstract principles of obligation which are universally applied to make moral decisions. Noddings explains her position on this matter as follows:

Suppose the one-caring has decided that she will not steal. She has come to this general rule or principle after more deliberation than I can record here, and the decision is firm. Once she has made the decision, temptation does not arise. Stealing is beneath her; it does not befit the picture she has formed of her ethical self. But, while the decision is firm and clear--and simplifies life greatly it is not ultimate, not absolute, and the one-caring knows this. The chances are excellent that the one-caring, in the kinds of situations those of us participating in this dialogue are likely to face, will never steal. But, related as she is by the basic bond of life, she will not place principle where it cannot possibly hold. It is too fragile to stay her hand in the presence of, say, a hungry child, a hungry friend, a hungry stranger. Thus, while the one-caring may lead a life
described by others as "highly principled," she is herself peculiarly wary of principles. She will not easily be distracted from the dynamic and complex events of concrete life by promises of abstract simplicity and permanence. Indeed, as we shall see, she might prefer to explain her abstinence from stealing without reference to a principle at all.\textsuperscript{86}

Critics of Noddings might seize on the above quote and other similar statements to accuse her of espousing an untenable relativism, romantic sentimentalism, or a sweeping agapism. She anticipates such objections and takes great pains to demonstrate why her ethic of care is distinct from these approaches. The above quote also illustrates that Noddings’ rejection of the binding force of ethical principles should not be construed as a license to engage in wanton mischief.

Another criticism Noddings makes of traditional approaches to moral reasoning concerns what she calls “the objectification” of moral decisions. She argues that objectification is the result of applying abstract principles and rules to concrete situations. She is critical of the confused notion that we can objectively impose a rule based construction on the world and solve moral issues as we would math or logic problems. This practice, Noddings contends, has the effect of leading to \textit{care taking} rather than genuine caring. It leads the ethical agent to view moral decisions as \textit{problems to be solved} rather than persons to be cared for. Noddings characterizes this move as being from “I must do something,” to “something must be done.”

Noddings is critical of this process for several reasons. The first is the artificial nature of this application of abstract principles on a given situation. She notes how different such an approach is from the way we actually make decisions which affect those we care for. Caring is born out of affection for the cared-for with due regard for the peculiarities of that individual and our relation to him.\textsuperscript{87} Noddings notes how strange it would be for a mother who cares for a child to engage in some type of abstract probability calculus in order to determine how to treat her child.\textsuperscript{88} Thus, Noddings calls attention to the difference between an abstract \textit{problem solving} approach to moral reasoning, and genuine caring, which she argues is motivated by feeling and affective engrossment.\textsuperscript{89}

Another criticism Noddings raises is that a rule based ethic inevitably promotes distancing and detachment which often leads to the elevation of principle over persons described previously. However, it is the \textit{depersonalizing detachment} that is the focus of

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her criticism here. This detachment can be seen in many professional and institutional settings: The doctor who treats symptoms and illnesses rather than helping people; The corporate executive who assuages his conscience by appealing to his obligation to the stockholders as he fires workers; And the teacher who appeals to principles of professional ethics or rules of academic conduct to avoid establishing a genuine caring relationship with students. Though recognizing that institutional society requires rules and principles in order to function, Noddings also holds that this move of appealing to rules and moral principles is often done at the expense of fostering care:

As we convert what we have received from the other into a problem, something to be solved, we move away from a problem, something to be solved, we move away from the other. We clean up his reality, strip it of complex and bothersome qualities, in order to think it. The other's reality becomes data, stuff to be analyzed, studied, interpreted. All this is to be expected and is entirely appropriate, provided that we see the essential turning points and move back to the concrete and personal. Thus we keep our objective thinking tied to a relational stake at the heart of caring. When we fail to do this, we can climb into clouds of abstraction, moving rapidly away from the caring situation into a domain of objective and impersonal problems where we are free to impose structure as we will. If I do not turn away from my abstractions, I lose the one cared-for. Indeed, I lose myself as one-caring, for I now care about a problem instead of a person.90

In addition to these general criticisms of principle based moral reasoning, Noddings also expresses skepticism about some of the traditional conceptions of morality such as rights, obligations, universalization, and the moral designations of "right" and "wrong," which have been employed by these systems. She notes the elusive, artificial, and disputable nature of claims which rely on these concepts. Noddings also questions whether such notions can serve as a motivating force for genuine caring. She notes that the child who harms an animal and is unmoved to refrain when told that he is hurting the animal, will not likely be constrained to stop when told that "hurting animals is wrong" (unless of course punitive sanctions are then threatened as well).91

Noddings also contends that the abstract nature and disputable status of these components of traditional ethics lends them to pernicious manipulation and sophistical gerrymandering.

In his paper on "Amoralism," Garner also makes these same criticisms of traditional moral reasoning. His lucid articulation of these matters compels me to include this lengthy quote:

Moralists claim that morality beats compassion and kindness, since these
feelings come and go. But morality only beats compassion and kindness if it makes good on its own ground, which it can’t, and if it actually is capable of influencing behavior, which can be debated. Compassion, on the other hand, is a direct motivator, and it doesn’t have to be justified. It is a way of looking, and a disposition to help. If you care about somebody, if you want them to be happy, there is nothing to prove and no problem about motivation. If you merely think it is your duty to help them, then it will always be possible to dig up some excuse for not doing anything. . . . Anything can be given a moral defense by a clever sophist, but no moral judgment can be conclusively established, no moral debate resolved once and for all. Morality can be (and has been) used to defend cruelty, selfishness, exploitation and neglect. By itself morality is insufficient for motivation, and its actual contribution to any decision is far from clear. It is not necessary for the kind of behavior it is thought to be a device to promote, and since people can be conventionally good without believing in the objectivity of morality, it makes sense to consider some alternatives. The alternative is, and always has been (in one form or another), expanded sympathies, increased concern for others.92

I will now conclude this section with a summary of Noddings’ criticisms of traditional moral reasoning. She argues that a rule based ethic creates the possibility and often the practice of elevating principle over persons. The practice of universally applying and imposing abstract principles on concrete situations leads to a detached objectifying of situations, thus reducing moral decisions to “problems to be solved” rather than persons to be cared for. This depersonalizing approach amounts to an artificial imposition of abstract principles in a way that does not resemble the actual reasoning process (i.e. one grounded in the particular affections of actual personal relations) which characterizes genuine caring. As Noddings notes, “we must not push the moral agent into artificial solutions contrived in a parallel world of abstraction.”93

Finally, traditional moral reasoning involves concepts such as objectively binding moral obligations, rights, intrinsic value, and the moral designations “right” and “wrong,” which have questionable metaphysical and epistemological status. The utilization of these disputable notions lends itself to manipulation, exploitation, and unresolvable arguments. Moreover, these traditional notions of morality fail to serve as effective motivating factors in generating care and compassion.

**BENNETT AND THE AMORALIST CHALLENGE**

I stated in the Introduction to this chapter that my rather lengthy examination of “amoralism” and Noddings’ *Caring* would be done in an attempt to set forth two significant challenges to Bennett’s guiding philosophical beliefs concerning morality and
moral education. To review, I noted three of Bennett's basic beliefs: Belief in objective morality; Belief in a broad consensus on the "basics of morality"; And the belief that effective moral education must be grounded in a commitment to basic moral principles. I feel that each of these three beliefs are problematic, as the discussions in the previous sections have demonstrated. Let us briefly consider each of these three beliefs.

First, Bennett's belief in objective morality. In would be a bit heavy-handed for me to be overly critical of Bennett on this matter. After all, amoralism is a rather novel position which Bennett may not have given much consideration to. However, I do feel that many of the criticisms of objective morality made by Garner, Mackie, and Noddings indicate there are some important philosophical problems with such a belief.

Second, Bennett's belief in a broad consensus on the basics of morality does not seem to be well founded. We discussed the lack of consensus in the philosophical literature on the subject. Debates continue over basic questions of value and obligation. Bennett's Book of Virtues can be faulted on this account. Namely, he presents "virtues" which are more controversial than he lets on. Several reviews of the book have noted the controversial status of some of the stories included in the book for their gender, race, and class bias, and their political and religious overtones.94

Finally, Bennett's contention that effective moral education must be grounded in a commitment to basic principles of morality, seems to be mistaken. Noddings' criticisms of traditional approaches to moral reasoning seem to apply to many of the "stories" in Bennett's Book of Virtues. For example, "Horatius at The Bridge" and Luther's "A Mighty Fortress" are just two examples that might be charged with promoting principle over persons. Bennett's commitment to principles can at times create a theoretical framework where one might be "committed to family values" and yet not value families. And there is the perennial question of whether Bennett's practice of discussing drugs and sex in moral terms can be an effective motivation for students to behave virtuously. When I was a preacher I believed that such moral stories could be a significant motivating force in peoples' lives. But in many cases, such stories, and all their
metaphysical clout are not able to serve as effective motivators. In conclusion then, I hope Bennett's *Book of Virtues* can be used to positively shape the character of young people. The question remains as to how successful it will be.

**SUMMARY**

I will now summarize the major findings of this chapter. I began by briefly mentioning Bennett's basic positions on moral education. First, Bennett is critical of non-directive approaches to moral education. He criticizes them for their relativistic bent and for their failure to cultivate sound character and virtuous behavior on the part of students. Bennett favors a brand of character education which finds its roots in Aristotle. Bennett argues that moral education should emphasize the modeling of moral behavior on the part of teachers, and habituating students to virtuous conduct. In his essay "Moral Literacy," and in *The Book of Virtues*, Bennett argues that literary examples are an important resource for teaching students what the "virtues look like," and for cultivating good character in students. He also contends that religious values can be an important auxiliary in the quest for promoting virtue in students.

I then engaged in an examination of Bennett's criticisms of non-directive approaches to moral education. I gave a brief account of three non-directive approaches: Values Clarification; Moral Reasoning; and the "personal relevance" approach of A. S. Neill's *Summerhill*. Though I did not offer a thorough critique of these approaches, I did agree with Bennett that each of these approaches has important flaws. Particularly his contention that--contrary to the key premise of these approaches--the prescribing of rules, principles, dictates, orders, guidelines, or standards of behavior is not inherently objectionable or pedagogically suspect. The issue is not a matter of "rules or no rules," but rather, "which rules and for what reasons." I argued that when prescribing rules, principles, or directives, the reflective teacher will give attention to the delicate balances between student freedom and classroom order, discipline and student autonomy. The rules prescribed should always be open to revision and assessment based on how well they contribute to the achievement of such educational goals as empowering, informing, encouraging, and equipping students to engage in an enlightened pursuit of the "good life."

I then considered Bennett's defense of directive moral education, focusing
primarily on his article “Moral Education and Indoctrination.” In this piece, Bennett argues that directive moral education does not entail a violation of a student’s autonomy or sectarian teaching inappropriate to a pluralistic society. He does recognize, however, that some directive education may constitute such violations. Thus, he directs his attention to establishing the criteria for deciding which moral and educational directives are acceptable. One of the criteria was that “to warrant directive teaching, a moral principle must first be clearly and firmly grounded.” This led me to a consideration of moral theory, to consider what it means for a moral principle to be “firmly grounded,” and also to examine Bennett’s belief in the manifest clarity of the “basics” of morality.

In my examination of ethical theory and moral education I argued that Bennett’s contention that there is a consensus concerning the basics of morality is erroneous. In fact, I noted the widespread disagreement and interminable debates which characterize ethical theory and which permeate even the basic questions of the difference between good and bad, and right and wrong. I argued that the position of “amoralism” provides a more satisfactory philosophical account of ethics than do other ethical theories which I have considered. I discussed Richard Garner’s explication of amoralism, and stated my agreement with the central claims of his position. These claims included: Beliefs and ideas about morality are founded upon such dubious philosophical notions as objective goodness and badness, and objective prescriptivity: Morality is a paternalistic deception that has often been used for manipulating and controlling others: A philosophical argument can be marshaled for almost any moral claim, therefore deception and sophistic rhetoric are the hallmarks of moralistic discourse: The amoralist may conduct her life in a manner others might consider “moral,” but such behavior on the amoralist’s part need not spring from considerations of morality: A blend of compassion, non-duplicity, and clarity about the use and limits of language is more likely to produce a decent world than any secular or religious moral system ever devised: And notions of morality and the vocabulary of moral discourse would best be discarded.

I considered and refuted some objections to amoralism. Then I briefly addressed the issue of applied ethics. I gave special attention to Nel Noddings’ Caring and her suggestions for moral education. I concurred with most of her criticisms of traditional approaches to moral reasoning, as well as her arguments for an approach to moral education based on caring rather than the abstract, elusive, and often contradictory
moral principles advocated by Bennett. Among the important claims made by Noddings are the following: A rule based ethic creates the possibility and often the practice of elevating principle over persons; The practice of universally applying and imposing abstract principles on concrete situations leads to a detached objectifying of situations, thus reducing moral decisions to "problems to be solved," rather than persons to be cared for; This depersonalized approach amounts to an artificial imposition of abstract principles in a way that does not resemble the actual reasoning process (i.e., one grounded in the particular affections of actual personal relations) which characterizes genuine caring; Traditional moral reasoning involves such philosophically dubious concepts as objectively binding moral obligations, rights, intrinsic value, and the moral designations of "right" and "wrong"; The utilization of these disputable notions lends itself to manipulation, exploitation, and unresolvable arguments. Moreover, these traditional notions of morality often fail to serve as effective motivating factors in generating care and compassion.
CHAPTER NOTES


3. "Situation ethics" is an approach to moral education associated with theologian Joseph Fletcher. On the back cover of Situation Ethics, this endorsement of Fletcher's work is given: "Here is a manifesto of individual freedom and individual responsibility, elaborated within an ethic of love, which extricates modern man from rigid, archaic rules and codes. Proclaiming that any moral system is too shallow and petty to provide answers, the author outlines a methodology for decision-making which presupposes individual responsibility and declares that every man must decide for himself what is right." Joseph Fletcher. Situation Ethics: the New Morality (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966). See, also: Harvey Cox, ed., The Situation Ethics Debated (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968).


5. Bennett, Our Children, p. 18.


19. Straughan, Can We Teach?, p. 17.


21. Straughan, Can We Teach?, p. 19.


28. Bennett, Our Children, p. 84

29. Kilpatrick, Why Johnny Can't, p. 94.


35. Eisner, Educational Imagination, p. 69.


70. The course is taught by Professor Gerald M. Reagan.


73. Strike & Soltis, *The Ethics of Teaching*, p. 58.


78. She does describe herself in a recent piece as a "heretic" in the field of ethics, where she is "working hard to introduce a new vocabulary." Nel Noddings, "Response to Suppes." in *Philosophy of Education 1995*, p. 129.

79. The course was taught by Professor Christine McCarthy.

80. The class was *A History of Women in Education*, taught by Professor Mary Leach.

82. Noddings, *Caring*, p. 89.


85. Noddings, *Caring*, p. 84.

86. Noddings, *Caring*, p. 56.

87. This raises the interesting issue of reporting to the legal authorities that a relative or friend has committed a crime. For example, the “Unabomber” case. This also raises a serious problem with Bennett’s views on virtues. Namely, how does one decide the “right” course of action when virtues conflict, such as in this case (loyalty vs. honesty). Bennett does not address this issue, but we see this tension at play in Bennett’s reaction to Reagan’s involvement in the Iran-Contra scandal. Bennett seems to favor the virtue of loyalty to his beloved president rather than honesty. Bennett’s account of this matter is included in *The De-Valuing*, pp. 234-48. Bennett writes: “I was appalled when the Iran-Contra crime broke out, to witness how silent many people in the Reagan administration, including the Cabinet, were in defense of the President; they headed for the tall grass and waited out events. The first impulse in this kind of situation should be to rally to the defense of you president. Loyalty—personal loyalty—is not in oversupply in this town. If the facts reveal your loyalty is misplaced, so be it. Then say it was misplaced. But the instinct to be loyal to one’s colleagues, to one’s president, is a good thing, not a misplaced, naive notion” (p. 234).

The issue of conflicting virtues and universalizing virtues is given treatment in James Q. Wilson’s review of the *Book of Virtues: Wilson, “Tales of Virtue.”*


89. Noddings, *Caring*, p. 35.

90. Noddings, *Caring*, p. 36.


94. For example, the following criticisms have been made of the controversial status of the “virtues” illustrated by the stories Bennett includes in *The Book of Virtues*: “It is certainly a surprise to find Genghis Khan used as an illustration of how important it is to ‘count to ten before you do anything, and if very angry, count to a hundred.’ And who but William Bennett, our very own McGuffey, would applaud Socrates’ decision to drink the hemlock as an example of ‘civil obedience’.‘: “The word ‘God’ appears with a regular beat throughout this anthology like a neon sign flashing ‘Cold Beer Served Here.’ I would gladly trade all those stories about psychopathic Roman warriors for just one about Dorothy Day. And I don’t know why Dr. Virtue has included as one of three selections from the New Testament, without explanatory historical notes, the section from Matthew about the Jewish high priests’ interrogation of Christ, which is the
notorious *locus classicus* of Christian anti-Semitism. Is he building character or a coalition?"; And concerning Bennett's citing of Booker T. Washington's autobiography as an example of perseverance and hard work, the reviewer writes: "And here is an author who is willing to use a man's remarkable courage and strength to trivialize the racism that still crushes so many people, whose stories did not make it into *The Book of Virtues*. If this is morality, give me wickedness—or give me death." From: Siegel, "Getting Better All the Time." Jean Porter writes: "Our national preoccupation with moral matters has its ambiguities. Moral passion can all too easily degenerate into self-righteousness and smugness. Moral Commitment can easily be translated into social repression, or still worse, it can serve as an ideology, which both obscures and perpetuates oppressive social arrangements. None of the great moral movements of this century, whatever point they occupy on the political and social spectrum, has prove entirely immune from these dangers." "Moreover, there is a great deal of politics in this book, and it is a troubling sort of politics, all the more so because Bennett denies that his work reflects a political agenda in any usual sense. . . . Bennett is hardly the first to assume that the virtues provide a noncontroversial basis for moral education. After all, who could quarrel with the desirability of self-control, compassion, courage and the rest? What this assumption overlooks, however, is that the virtues are uncontroroversial only so long as they are formulated at a fairly high level of abstraction. . . . Once we attempt to translate general virtues into a set of specific ideas about how people should conduct their lives, it is inevitable that a good deal of controversy and, yes, political content will be introduced." From: Jean Porter, "The Moral Life according to William Bennett."
CHAPTER V

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

INTRODUCTION

Now I come to the conclusion of the study. It might be said that I am bringing this study to a close. However, I am not very comfortable with the "closure" metaphor. It has too great a degree of finality for my purposes. The closure metaphor seems more appropriate to detectives solving a case, or a jury acquitting a defendant in a criminal case. As I am writing this, I am sitting in the Franklin County Jury Pool room. Last week I was sitting as a juror in a murder trial, but I was peremptorily dismissed during voir dire. Thus the "verdict" metaphor readily comes to mind. I am also reminded of the metaphor we used in the music business for the conclusion of a song: "Bring it on home." This expression functions—as does the term 'climax'—as an "orgasmic" metaphor. At some level, I am sure there is some conceptual relation between the orgasmic metaphor and the idea of coming to a conclusion.¹ But as with the closure metaphor, the orgasmic metaphor does not adequately suggest the seminal (to take the metaphor a step further) qualities that I hope to achieve in this concluding chapter. In other words, I hope that my findings will be suggestive and directive in generating further research, reflection, study, and pedagogical experimentation. Both for myself, and for those who might read this. Thus, I think a more appropriate way of thinking about the concluding chapter might be in terms of "lessons learned." Of course, among the chief lessons I learned from this study was that there is so much I have yet to learn. Thus, when I use the term 'lesson', I have in mind both the conclusions, generalizations, and findings I derive from the study, and the instructive prescriptions which such conclusions might suggest for further study and reflection, for the doing of philosophy, and for educational practice.

In some dissertations the Conclusion often includes "suggestions for further study," which seem to be contrived afterthoughts. For example, "we could have an empirical study of . . ." I think in many cases this is the result of the fictive notion that
many (or any) people outside of the candidate’s dissertation committee will read the work. Hence, I will emphasize the personal dimension of “suggestions for further study.” In other words, I am primarily concerned with how my own work as a philosopher and educator might be enriched by pursuing further the questions raised in this study. If by chance someone stumbles upon this work, I encourage that individual to take what they can from this study, and “run with it.”

The remainder of this chapter will be organized in the following manner: I will first discuss two findings concerning methodology (metaphors and methods of assessment). Then I will discuss some significant findings from each of the three preceding chapters, and also offer suggestions for further study.

**METAPHERS, ASSESSMENT, AND METHODOLOGY**

In the introductory chapter of this work I mentioned that I would employ the analysis of metaphors in my critique of Bennett’s views. I had always included a discussion of metaphors in the classes I teach, and I felt metaphor analysis might be a useful tool in this study. I did not anticipate, however, that the consideration of metaphors would take as prominent a role in my study as it did. In every chapter of this study I gave consideration to either the metaphors used by Bennett, or to using metaphors to assess Bennett’s views. The metaphors to which I gave attention included: the culture *war* metaphor, the politics as *creed* metaphor, the *preacher* metaphor, the *transmission* metaphor, the *final judgment* metaphor, and the *binding* metaphor for morality. As I engaged in the study I gained a fuller recognition and appreciation for the importance of metaphors in our public discourse. Thus, it was with amusement that I listened to a recent PBS radio interview with comedian George Carlin (PBS 3-30-96). Carlin was asked about his use of profanity. Carlin explained by using a *stew* metaphor. He claimed that profanity functioned in his comedy routines as spice does in a stew—giving it flavor. The interviewer responded that some might view obscene language as “adding MSG to the stew.”

In this encounter we see metaphors being used to illustrate, explain, justify, argue, and assess. We could no doubt list numerous ways which metaphors function. The list could include such functions as instruction, humor, provocation, forming hypotheses, guiding decisions, conceptualizing and promoting policy arguments and so on. In their article “Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language,” George Lakoff and
Mark Johnson go so far as to argue that “in all aspects of life, not just in politics or in love, we define our reality in terms of metaphor, and then proceed to act on the basis of the metaphor.” Even in the very conception of the purpose and intent of this closing chapter, the consideration of metaphors was central. When Professor Pratte was discussing this chapter with me, he suggested the tapestry metaphor. He likened my findings to threads which must be woven into a coherent and expressive tapestry.

In discussing metaphors, one of the most important points to remember is that we are dealing with metaphors. That is, we need to avoid the trap of being “hexed” or mislead by metaphors. Erich Fromm warns of this danger in his book *Beyond The Chains of Illusion*. Fromm writes, “Indeed one of the greatest dangers to be avoided is to confuse words with facts; the fetishism of words prevents the understanding of reality.”

As I argued on several occasions in this study, Bennett’s reliance on certain metaphoric conceptions of social and educational policy does at times function to cloud his understanding, and contributes to what I consider to be mistaken policy arguments. His reliance on the war metaphor is the primary case in point. But my purpose here is not to rehash my assessment of the metaphors Bennett uses, nor is it my intention to engage in an assessment of Bennett’s use of metaphor. Rather, I am simply pointing out a finding concerning the methodology of this study. Namely, that the assessment, examination, and use of metaphors was an important facet in my study.

**Suggestions For Further Study**

In light of this finding, I make the following suggestions for further study. First, I would like to engage in an examination of the literature on metaphors. I know that much has been written on metaphors. This examination would not focus on the philosophy of language angle, so much, but rather on the literature pertaining to the assessment of metaphors and the use of metaphors in particular fields (e.g. education or politics). I have alluded to some of the literature on the assessment of educational metaphors. Perhaps an investigation of the metaphors of educational assessment would be a fruitful line of inquiry. Second, I would like to develop the discussion of metaphors in my pedagogy. In the past, my lessons on metaphors have proven to be a successful tool in enabling students to think and write philosophically about issues which are of interest to them. Students in my classes have often examined metaphors for their class project (a fifteen minute philosophical presentation on a topic of the student’s
choosing). I will continue to innovate, experiment, and catalog examples in my effort to avail myself of the pedagogical possibilities the study of metaphors provides. Third, the topic of metaphors offers many possibilities for writing. For example, papers might be written on Bennett's use of particular metaphors (the war metaphor or the final judgment metaphor), or my metaphoric characterization of Bennett as a preacher of creetal politics. Larger projects might include works on "The Culture War and Other Metaphors of Contemporary Public Discourse," "Metaphors and Moral Education," or "Metaphors and The Conservative Mind."

**Pragmatic Assessment**

This brings me to my second major finding concerning the methodology of this study. I found that in seeking to assess Bennett's claims, arguments, and positions, I was moving toward a philosophical orientation that might be called functionalism, instrumentalism, or perhaps pragmatism. In short, I found that assessment is always relative to the particular context and function of the "thing" being assessed. This is in contrast to Bennett's philosophical orientation which emphasizes assessment in terms of grand, transcendent, universal standards and principles. I argued that this is the case in Bennett's views on politics (political views are assessed in terms of commitment to ideas and first principles), culture and the curriculum (philosophically dubious judgments that some works are "the best"), and moral values (the existence and manifest clarity of objective moral principles).

This finding was "brought home" to me when I was reading Ernest E. Bayles' *Pragmatism in Education*. He argues that pragmatism involves "taking relativity seriously." As I did on several occasions in this study, Bayles also argues that relativity is not a matter of "anything goes," but rather, relativity involves the recognition that "categories or boundaries of patterns are humanly determined, dependent upon the exigencies of time, place, circumstance, insight, and purpose." At another point, Bayles writes:

> It is when conclusions are taken as permanently fixed or finalized that they stand in the way of progressive reconstruction, when, having taken on the aura of sanctity, they are presumably nevermore to be questioned. A conclusion, adopted as the best obtainable under a given set of circumstances but pertinaciously held subject to later reassessment or continuing examination, may well serve, without losing its hypothetical status, as a basis for designing actions that need meanwhile to be taken. Such conclusions serve as way stations for thought, not as terminals. ⁴
When I read this, I was struck by the similarity to my own argument in Chapter Four concerning the provisional and instrumental justification of rules.

In light of this finding I make the following suggestion for study. Namely, I would like to engage in a thorough examination of the literature on pragmatism. I must admit that this is an area of study in which I am sorely lacking. As Professor Pratte is wont to remind me, I never took the class on Dewey. Hence I propose a reading program to acquaint myself with the literature by Dewey, Peirce, and James. I also plan to read Scheffler’s *Four Pragmatists*, Cornel West’s *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*, and some works by Richard Rorty, who has been labeled by some as a “neo-pragmatist.” This study should enable me to explicate more clearly the philosophical orientation to making judgments, evaluations, and assessments, which I tentatively find attractive.

**BENNETT AND POLITICS**

I will now briefly state four major findings of my critique of Bennett’s views on the politics of the culture wars: [1] Bennett’s views on the politics of the culture wars are seriously flawed. [2] Bennett is an important and significant figure in the contemporary political landscape. [3] Bennett’s contributions to public discourse lack the intellectual substance which might distinguish them or earn them lasting esteem and recognition. [4] There are signs that Bennett may continue to play a significant role in national politics, and there are also signs that his political clout is waning. How is that for a political response? Let us now take a closer look at each of these findings.

**Finding #1**

I stated in the introductory chapter that the purpose of this study was to accurately set forth some of Bennett’s views and to assess those views. Having done that, I concluded that Bennett’s views on the politics of the culture wars are seriously flawed. Allow me to summarize some of the flaws which I pointed out in Chapter Two. First of all, Bennett’s depiction of the opposing sides in the culture war hinges on the positing of a tendentious and inaccurate dichotomy between liberal elites and mainstream America. He can justifiably be charged with purveying the rhetorical devices of demonizing his opponents and wrapping his own rhetoric in a cloak of honorific symbolic associations. His inaccurate account obscures the fact that the culture wars
are best described as a conflict between elites. In other words, Bennett’s portrayal does not acknowledge the influential role of the well financed conservative think tanks and publishing organizations in which he is involved. These groups have been involved in the publicizing--and some would say “manufacturing”--of the so-called “threat” of political correctness. I argued that his reliance on the war metaphor in guiding much of his public speech has served to promote polarization, animosity, and a tragic and unnecessary deterioration of dialogue on these important issues. I noted that Bennett’s lack of intellectual rigor in the presentation of his views has been a common target of criticism.

I also argued that his views are fraught with inconsistencies, incongruities, and contradictions, several of which I examined. For example, I discussed the inconsistencies in Bennett’s calls for study of the classics in the humanities and his commitment to the austere fiscal policies of the Reagan era which involved funding cuts for the arts and education. I argued (and cited several examples of this same criticism) that Bennett’s harangues against higher education and political correctness were often attempts to reconcile this contradiction. In other words, Bennett’s fatuous contention that money isn’t the solution to our educational problems, was actually an attempt to justify Federal cuts in education spending.

I also argued that Bennett’s “1960s bashing” was seriously flawed. I noted that for nearly every social and educational issue Bennett examines, he cites the locus of the problems in the liberal philosophy and policies of the 1960s. But in his account of this matter, Bennett fails in his attempt to demonstrate that the liberal elite were the sole or even dominant architects of the social and educational policy of the 1960s. He fails to note that many of the social policies initiated in the 1960s did result in increased opportunity and social mobility for women, minorities, and the poor. Finally, his argument that the policy of the 1960s caused our current social and educational problems carelessly omits the consideration of other--and I believe more compelling--explanations. Explanations rooted in economic, sociological, and demographic research.

**Finding #2**

My second finding is that Bennett is a significant and important figure in the contemporary political landscape. In the introductory chapter I argued that Bennett’s high visibility and involvement in some of the most important cultural,
political, and educational debates of our times warranted our consideration of his views. So, in a sense, his importance was a reason to engage in this study rather than a conclusion reached on the basis of this study. Nevertheless, this study served to confirm my initial belief that Bennett is a major figure in the contemporary debates over culture, politics, and values in education and society. I agree with E. J. Dionne's assessment that Bennett "may have been the most successful case of a neoconservative who became a right-wing hero."

With the advent of the Reagan era we saw the emergence of a new Republican coalition of economic and social conservatives. Bennett must be regarded as one of the most influential figures to give voice to the intellectual foundations of the Conservative movement. Other significant figures in the contemporary Conservative movement would include: Newt Gingrich, Jack Kemp, Jesse Helms, Dick Armey, Phil Gramm, Lamar Alexander, James Dobson, Rush Limbaugh, William F. Buckley, Irving Kristol, William Kristol, Paul Weyrich, Dan Quayle, Pat Buchanan, George Will, Cal Thomas, Pat Robertson, and Ralph Reed. However, none of these individuals seem to match the breadth of involvement which has characterized Bennett's public career. By this I am referring to the fact that Bennett has had extensive experience in academic and scholarly circles, government service at the national level, as well being a highly visible and well known author, speaker, activist, and social commentator. Though I do not concur with many of Bennett's philosophical positions or his arguments for educational and social policy. I can not deny that he has been an important and influential voice in many of the most pressing educational and social debates of the last decade.7

**Finding #3**

My third finding is that Bennett's contributions to public discourse lack the intellectual substance which might distinguish them or earn them lasting esteem and recognition. By the term 'contributions', I am referring to Bennett's books, articles, essays, speeches, and social commentary reported in the media. In other words, the body of his work. I noted several times in this study the criticisms which have been made of the quality of his work. I feel that most of these criticisms are justified. Bennett's work lacks the originality of thought, depth of scholarship, critical insight, or quality of presentation which are the hallmarks of good literature, philosophy, and other forms of public discourse. In his review of *The Book of Virtues*, journalism Jerry
Adler comments that Bennett's life and work "consists largely of giving speeches, listening to people urge you to run for president and collecting royalties on books consisting almost entirely of stuff in the public domain. (Of his three other books, one was a compilation of speeches.)" Adler comments that if reading the 821 page book "doesn't get your kids to stop watching Beavis and Butt-head and start reading the Federalist Papers, you can always swat their fat backsides with it." I would not deny that the commercial success of The Book of Virtues and its spinoffs indicate an element of marketing genius. Nevertheless, the intellectual substance of Bennett's work is not of an inordinately high quality.

Thus we have another instance of the inconsistencies and even ironies of the life and work of William J. Bennett. He is a man who has taken as his motto "It is ideas which shape civilization," yet his own ideas lack the originality, rigor, and insight which mark the lasting and significant ideas which do impact society. He argues for a study of the classics, yet his work lacks the qualities which characterize the great (or even critically esteemed) works of literature, philosophy, and social criticism. At times he seems to possess only a superficial understanding of the great works he endorses. He calls for raising academic standards and for educational excellence, yet his own work does not fair well when submitted to the rigors, scrutiny, standards of assessment, and peer review of established academic disciplines. Bennett has written and spoken on the importance of "modeling" in moral education. I would contend that modeling is also an important pedagogical approach for other areas of education. I would not recommend, however, the work of Bennett as a model for an aspiring philosopher, social critic, or public intellectual.

Finding #4

My fourth finding is that there are indications that Bennett will continue to be a significant figure in national politics, and there are also indications that his political clout is on the wane. To "cut to the chase," I would say the issue of Bennett’s historical and political significance hinges on whether or not he seeks the Presidency. I believe the chances are good that he will at some time run for President. Though his skills as a campaigner are untested, I think it is a very real possibility that he could capture the Republican nomination and be a serious contender for the office. In an article on the prospects of a Colin Powell presidential bid, columnist Mona Charen concurred with
those conservatives who opposed a Powell candidacy, such as Paul Weyrich. Charen writes: "Weyrich is a seasoned political activist of strong and consistent views who has long argued that the cultural and social decay of the United States is the most urgent item on the political agenda. It was for this reason that Weyrich implored Bill Bennett to seek the Republican presidential nomination. Even today, Weyrich believes that if Bennett had chosen to run, he would be the clear favorite." But politics are difficult to predict, and I am hesitant to make any prediction in print, but what the heck? I predict that William Bennett will be the Republican candidate for President in the year 2000.

If however, he doesn't seek the presidency, there are indications that his influence in politics will wane. There is also evidence that Bennett is growing at odds with many within the conservative movement. For example, conservative columnist and occasional guest host of the Rush Limbaugh radio show, Tony Snow, has written that Bennett's foray into policing daytime television talk shows is beneath a man of Bennett's stature. Snow writes: "Bill Bennett and Co. want to kill these shows by intimidating sponsors. But that is unworthy of Bennett, who has performed a considerable service by reminding people that the concept of virtue springs from a deep well of experience and tradition. The latest crusade makes Bennett look like a scolding ayatollah, eager to punish the smallest sin." Bennett made the following assessment of daytime TV talk shows: "How about a Bronx cheer? Let's say this stinks and let's try to get this garbage off the air. We've forgotten that civilization depends on keeping some of this stuff under wraps. These shows talk about sex and violence and sleeping around, with topics like 'Enlarge your breasts or I'm outta here.' This is a force of decomposition. This is a tropism toward the toilet. It's not good." John Judis has argued that as early as the closing year of Bennett's tenure at the Department of Education, Bennett had "reduced his vaunted--and valuable--campaign for cultural and moral literacy to a narrow headline-grabbing crusade for prayer and against drugs and promiscuity."

There are other examples that indicate Bennett may be moving away from the hard-core conservative orthodoxy that has characterized recent Republican politics. A case in point is Bennett and Jack Kemp's opposition to California's anti-immigration measure, Proposition 186. On this issue Bennett locked horns with California's
Republican governor Pete Wilson and the arch-foe of immigration, Pat Buchanan. Bennett has also expressed some recent concern with the austerity of the conservative's fiscal policy. He has argued that without a plan to invest in families and communities, "the conservative agenda is politically dominant but fundamentally incomplete. If the liberal fallacy is an abiding faith in the all-sufficiency of government, then the conservative fallacy could easily become an abiding faith in the all-sufficiency of nongovernment."15 Perhaps the best example of Bennett's growing distance from the ultra-conservative elements of the Republican party came in October of 1995, when Bennett spoke favorably of the possible presidential candidacy of Colin Powell. Mona Charen commented on this matter:

Bill Bennett has been at the center of the maelstrom. Since his appearance on This Week with David Brinkley several weeks ago, where he had pleasant (though still noncommittal) words for the general, faxes and angry letters have been flying among some members of the party's right wing. Because Bennett allowed as how he could support a candidate who favored abortion rights, citing Sens. Paul Coverdell, R-Ga., and Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, as examples, James Dobson, host of a popular conservative radio program, denounced Bennett publicly as having surrendered to the "pro-abortion" position—which is a little like calling Winston Churchill "pro-Stalin" for having welcomed the Soviet Union's entry into World War II.16

Because of Powell's stands on abortion, affirmative action, and The Contract with America, Charen concluded that Powell is "not conservatism's leader." Whether or not Bennett will continue his movement away from the ultra-right positions of the Republican party remains to be seen. However, if he does, I feel it will only diminish his political clout. Though Bennett's positions in these three examples may seem to be reasonable, they are viewed by many committed conservatives as dangerous deviations from the party line. In other words, conservatives are marked by their commitment to principles. I argued earlier that Pat Buchanan's views were simply the logical extension of the creedal politics which Bennett himself practiced. If, as conservatives have maintained, commitment to principles is paramount, then Bennett's slight deviations from the creedal tenets of conservatism will be viewed by many Republicans with suspicion and scorn.

Suggestions for Further Study

Though my study was intended primarily to assess the views and arguments of William Bennett, I have attempted to incorporate some discussion of Bennett's political
activities. However, I feel that a comprehensive biographical study of Bennett is in order. John B. Judis and Frank Deford have written short biographical accounts of Bennett, but I feel Bennett's public career is of sufficient significance to warrant a biography. Perhaps I could team up with a journalist or historian and combine my critique with an extensive biographical account of Bennett.

I would also like for Bennett to read this study and offer a response. I would like to pursue an extensive interview with Bennett, in which we would discuss the findings of my study. Such an interview could augment my study and perhaps enable me to develop the study into a book which would warrant publication.

BENNETT, CULTURE, AND THE CURRICULUM

I will now briefly state two major findings of my examination of Bennett's views on culture and the curriculum. [1] Bennett's calls for a curricular emphasis on content, and for the promotion of cultural literacy are commendable. [2] Bennett's arguments for the superiority of Western Culture are fatuous, and they have anti-educational consequences in theory and practice.

Finding #1

In Chapter Three, I set forth Bennett's arguments for an emphasis on a core content in the curriculum. I noted that Bennett's proposals on this matter struck a satisfactory balance between skills and content, as is seen in his "James Madison" curricular plans. For the most part Bennett recognizes that mastery of content is not an end in itself, but rather can serve as a necessary prerequisite for the development of higher order thinking skills. I cited one of my own educational experiences as an example of the effectiveness of a pedagogical balance between content and skills. I also mentioned that I try to implement a similar approach in the classes I teach. For example, students must first achieve a relative mastery of some rudimentary concepts and tools of philosophy (basic content) before they can successfully engage in the "doing" of philosophy (skills).

I also concurred with Bennett on the importance and value of cultural literacy. More specifically, I was largely sympathetic to the views of E. D. Hirsch on cultural literacy; views which have been championed and popularized by Bennett. I agreed that a
rudimentary knowledge of the persons, events, ideas, and writings which have shaped our society is a valuable thing to possess, and a worthy educational goal to pursue. The instrumental value of cultural literacy is undeniable. I did argue, however, that while Hirsch advocates cultural literacy as a neutral tool which can be applied to a variety of political ends, Bennett promotes cultural literacy as a conservative and stabilizing (I would say "stagnating") political device. A device used by Bennett to legitimize and propagate his romantic and specious portrayal of the of the supposed superiority of Western Culture.

I also discussed Bennett's characterization of aesthetic and cultural relativism. Bennett claims that if an individual refuses to make some abstract judgment that one culture or intellectual tradition is "better," or "the best," then that person is a relativist. It is assumed in Bennett's charges (though seldom explicated), that relativism is a philosophically deficient position which has pernicious social consequences. In his caricature of the relativist, Bennett inaccurately suggests that if one embraces relativism then she thereby abandons any philosophical grounding on which to make judgments. Thus, Bennett can argue that because one hedges from testifying to the glories of the Western political tradition, then she can be charged with "doubting the preferability of civilization to savagery, of democracy to totalitarianism." This move on Bennett's part is unacceptable and inaccurate. I cited Fish, Berube, and Hirsch to demonstrate that simply because someone refuses to base judgments on transcendent, abstract standards, this does not mean that one has abandoned the possibility—or desirability—of making judgments. Holding that judgments are relative to particular contexts does not mean that "anything goes," that all judgments are equal, or that all works of literature are of equal merit.

Finding # 2

The first part of my second finding is that Bennett's arguments for the superiority of Western culture are fatuous. In Chapter Three I set forth Bennett's arguments for the intellectual, philosophical, and political superiority of Western culture. I argued that Bennett was operating from a "final judgment" metaphor in his attempts to apply some grand historical calculus to make a hierarchical ranking of the world's civilizations. I determined that this approach was a flawed and dubious endeavor, and also that the Bennett's motivation for making such a judgment was educationally and politically suspect. The second part of my finding is that Bennett's insistence on maintaining the
superiority of Western culture has some undesirable consequences as it plays out in educational theory and practice.

An example of this concerns Bennett’s curricular proposals for multicultural education, which I argued, fail to adequately address the concerns of our culturally diverse society. I argued that Bennett views the cultural differences of America’s students as “obstacles to overcome,” rather than as an educational resource to tap into. I added that in his zeal to praise the primacy of the West, Bennett exudes a smugness which is unjustified, and in my opinion, serves no educational purpose. We can see this in his suggestion that the Western intellectual tradition be “the platform from which other cultures are studied.” Clearly, this is a condescending approach which flies in the face of the demand for various cultural groups to be heard on “their own terms.”

I contended that Bennett’s approach to the curriculum often seems to include the study of other cultures as an insignificant afterthought, or in the form of token inclusion. Stanley Fish calls this token inclusion the “and Alice Walker move.” Jeff Zorn also criticizes Bennett’s curricular proposals on this matter, charging Bennett’s inclusion of the writings of Martin Luther King, Jr. in the curriculum as an exercise in “mock-diversifying” the curriculum. Zorn argues that in his zeal to uphold the loftiness of “our civilization,” Bennett has co-opted King’s legacy in a way that perverts the progressive and revolutionary nature of King’s ideals and public career. I concluded that Bennett’s attempts to emphasize Western culture are often exercises in preserving tradition rather than efforts to empower and educate students. This is apparent in Bennett’s claim that in addition to studying Western culture we need also to “value and defend the West.” I can heartily endorse the study of Western culture, but Bennett’s calls to defend and value the West seem to involve a political agenda to which I can not concur.

I also cited Frank Moretti’s charge that Bennett and other cultural conservatives’ advocacy of “the great books” is done in a spirit which is contrary to the critical ethos which pervades the classics. In other words, Bennett’s approach to the classics involves ascribing a certain sanctity to the great works of Western culture. To paraphrase one critic, Bennett’s curricular approach suggests that “the humanities are a section in the library rather than a discipline.” In short, Bennett’s curricular proposals involve a rather uncritical approach which does not avail itself to the subversive, critical, and
creative possibilities which make the study of the humanities worthwhile and exciting.

**Suggestions For Further Study**

Having agreed with Bennett and Hirsch on the importance and value of cultural literacy, this raises the question of which pedagogical methods best cultivate cultural literacy. I am not going to propose a quantitative empirical study to answer this question. I already have a good idea of some steps which must be taken to promote cultural literacy in our students. Namely, developing a school and social environment in which students have access to culture and opportunities to participate in our culture. In other words, I am talking about taking field trips; providing students opportunities to travel; providing students access to libraries, concerts, plays, museums, films, magazines, newspapers, videos, and recorded music; providing students with the opportunities to participate in art, music, school plays, debate teams, community service, civic activities, quiz show teams, sports, photography, school newspapers, computer work, and science fairs; and exposing students to mature adults who are involved in these activities. A student's involvement in these activities will enable her to see that achieving cultural literacy can be valuable, satisfying, challenging, fun, and even sexy.

I would also contend that such opportunities be developed for society at large. However, what Karl Marx called "the dull compulsion" of capitalist social relations often prevents individuals from pursuing the cultivation of their talents, and enjoying participation in art and culture. I am afraid that this tendency will be aggravated in the United States, to the degree that the conservative fiscal policies inaugurated by Ronald Reagan and continued by Newt Gingrich and company, are implemented. The same is true in regard to the conservative battle cry that "money is not the solution to our schools' problems." What is called for here, is political action, and a vigorous public defense of the national imperative to increase and make more equitable the funding of schools, which will improve opportunities and provide students access to participation in cultural activities. I believe such programs and educational initiatives are thwarted by Bennett and other conservatives' contentions that such programs constitute "curricular fluff." Bennett calls for educators to "get back to the basics," and to feature "the great works of Western Civilization." I am of the opinion that increased funding for schools, and the thoughtful promotion of the programs and opportunities listed above, are more likely to cultivate students' knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of our
cultural heritage than the sermons and exhortations provided by Bennett ever will.

Another line of inquiry which I would like to pursue involves a study of historical precedents to Bennett's criticisms of public schools and his calls for a reclamation of "our common culture." An example of such a historical precedent which I referred to in this study was the case of Matthew Arnold. I noted Bennett's penchant for citing Arnold's claim that schools should teach "the best that has been thought and said" in order to preserve the common culture. I also noted that both Bennett and Arnold's exhortations were framed in the face of political, philosophical, and economic challenges to the dominant culture. An interesting paper topic would be a comparison of Bennett and Arnold on this matter, with particular emphasis on the social conditions which prompted their calls for the preservation of "the best" culture.

Another way which "waves of criticism" aimed at the public schools has been studied is found in Mary Anne Raywid's book The Ax-Grinders. In this work, Raywid examines the rash of criticisms which had been leveled at America's public schools in the post-World War II era. At the time of the book's publication (1962), Raywid wrote that "the practice of criticizing our schools is well on its way to becoming a national pastime." She argues that "a prominent feature of the postwar period has been a rash of criticism which is neither accurate nor designed to improve. There have been abundant charges, some patently untrue, some containing a seed of truth enlarged and distorted to grotesque proportions. Perhaps even more serious are the charges which are not concerned primarily with facts, but with values that mirror or proclaim purposes that could destroy public education." 19

What I would like to examine, specifically, are historical precedents to Bennett's sanctimonious and exaggerated posturing, which is predicated on the belief that the schools' failure to inculcate a knowledge of the common culture presents a serious threat to "our very way of life." When I would read Bennett's claims to this effect, I was reminded of a song by Alice Cooper, The Department of Youth. Cooper sang, "We'll make it through our darkest hour, we're living proof. And we've never heard of Billy Sunday, Damon Runyon, manners or couth. We're the department of youth." 20 I am sympathetic to the youthful energy and irreverent spirit of Cooper's song, but perhaps not so sympathetic to its anti-intellectual tone. The youth of today—as with the youth of any era—are a great untapped resource of energy, talent, and creative potential. We,
as educators, need to focus our concern on providing students the opportunities and tools with which they can become involved in the cultivation and utilization of their talents. What they don’t need is another banal sermon from Bennett and his fellow conservatives.

Another matter which warrants further study concerns Bennett’s views on popular culture. Throughout this study, I made numerous references to some of the “great works” of Western culture, as well as numerous references to popular culture. I enjoy, and am enriched by the study of both, and I feel that both popular culture and “high culture” are worthy subjects of study in our schools. I do not find a similar sentiment in the curricular proposals of Bennett. Just as Bennett’s insistence on the superiority of Western culture thwarts the study of other cultures, so does his insistence on a study of the great books thwart the valuable study of popular culture. Bennett might contend that he has no problem with the study of popular culture, but students need first to acquaint themselves with the ideas of the great books in order to provide them with an intellectual platform from which to evaluate popular culture. But such an argument overlooks the fact that a student’s interest in popular culture might be used by the skillful teacher as a bridge or motivating factor in directing the student to a study of the great books.21 A possible way of approaching this matter might involve a study of Matt Groening’s cartoon series, The Simpsons. A conservative watchdog group called the Media Research Center recently criticized The Simpsons for “ridiculing entrepreneurs, religion, the police and educators.” On the plus side, the group concluded that “Marge Simpson is a loyal and loving matriarch.”22 Though The Simpsons has not yet been an object of Bennett’s public censure, I am sure the irreverent tone of the show would not be to his liking. What I would like to propose, is writing a book called “Philosophy According to The Simpsons.” Such a work would include an examination of the philosophical issues raised in the show, and it could also be designed to serve as a model for teachers on how to use popular culture as a bridge to further study of these issues in a broader academic sense. Perhaps another book could be comprised of a study of several forms of popular culture. For example, chapters might include “Philosophy according to”: Calvin and Hobbes; Star Trek; Public Enemy; John Lennon; Jerry Seinfeld; and Star Wars.

One final suggestion for further study involves Bennett’s publicized attacks on
rap music and daytime TV talk shows. I see in these attacks strong similarities to the impassioned outcries made against rock and roll music in the 1950s, particularly the racist undertones. When I suggest to my class that there is an element of racism in Bennett's attacks, many in the class are skeptical of such charges. Therefore, a comparative study of Bennett's attacks on rap music and earlier attacks on rock and roll would provide an excellent topic for a paper.

**BENNETT, VALUES, AND MORAL EDUCATION**

I will now briefly state four major findings of my examination of Bennett's views on values and moral education. [1] Bennett has been an important figure in popularizing the discussion of moral education. [2] Bennett's criticisms of non-directive approaches to moral education are well taken. [3] There are significant philosophical problems with Bennett's views on the existence of objective morality and his contentions on the manifest clarity of the basics of morality. [4] Nel Noddings' *Caring* offers compelling criticisms of traditional approaches to moral reasoning, as well as offering some promising alternatives to these traditional approaches. I will now discuss each of these findings.

**Finding #1**

Bennett has been a major figure in popularizing the discussion of moral education. This can be seen in the tremendous commercial success of *The Book of Virtues* and its various spinoffs. The main arguments Bennett brings to the discussion of moral education are as follows: First, Bennett is critical of non-directive approaches to moral education. He criticizes them for their relativistic bent and also for their failure to cultivate sound character and virtuous behavior on the part of students. Second, Bennett favors a brand of character education which finds its roots in Aristotle. Bennett argues that moral education should emphasize the modeling of moral behavior on the part of teachers, and habituating students to virtuous conduct. Third, in his essay "Moral Literacy," and in *The Book of Virtues*, Bennett argues that literary examples are an important resource for teaching students what the "virtues look like," and for cultivating good character in students. Finally, he also contends that religious values can be an important auxiliary in the quest for promoting virtue in students.

**Finding #2**

My second finding is that Bennett's criticisms of non-directive moral education
are well taken. In Chapter Four I engaged in an examination of these criticisms. I gave a brief account of three non-directive approaches: Values Clarification; Moral Reasoning; and the "personal relevance" approach of A. S. Nell's *Summerhill*. Though I did not offer a thorough critique of these approaches, I did agree with Bennett that each of these approaches has important flaws. I particularly agreed with his contention that--contrary to the key premise of these approaches--the prescribing of rules, principles, dictates, orders, guidelines, or standards of behavior is not inherently objectionable or pedagogically suspect. The issue is not a matter of "rules or no rules," but rather, "which rules and for what reasons." I argued that when prescribing rules, principles, or directives, the reflective teacher will give attention to the delicate balances between student freedom and classroom order, and discipline and student autonomy. The rules prescribed should always be open to revision and assessment based on how well they contribute to the achievement of such educational goals as empowering, informing, encouraging, and equipping students to engage in an enlightened pursuit of the "good life."

**Finding #3**

My third finding is that there are some significant philosophical problems with Bennett's views on the objectivity of morality, as well as with his contentions on the manifest clarity of the basics of morality. In Chapter Four I examined the issue of ethical theory and moral education, and argued that Bennett's contention that there is a consensus concerning the basics of morality, is erroneous. In fact, I noted the widespread disagreement and interminable debates which characterize ethical theory and which permeate even the basic questions of the difference between good and bad, and right and wrong. I argued that the position of "amoralism" provides a more satisfactory philosophical account of ethics than do other ethical theories which I have considered.

I discussed Richard Garner's explication of *amoralism*, and stated my agreement with the central claims of his position. These claims included: Beliefs and ideas about morality are founded upon such dubious philosophical notions as *objective goodness* and *badness*, and *objective prescriptivity*; Morality is a paternalistic deception that has often been used for manipulating and controlling others; A philosophical argument can be marshaled for almost any moral claim, therefore deception and sophistic rhetoric are the hallmarks of moralistic discourse; The amoralist may conduct her life in a manner
others might consider "moral," but such behavior on the amoralist's part need not
spring from considerations of morality: A blend of compassion, non-duplicity, and
clarity about the use and limits of language is more likely to produce a decent world
than any secular or religious moral system ever devised: Notions of morality and the
vocabulary of moral discourse would best be discarded.

Finding #4

I found that in her book Caring, Nel Noddings offers some compelling criticisms of
traditional approaches to moral reasoning, as well as offering some promising
alternatives to these traditional approaches. I concurred with many of Noddings' views,
particularly her call for a form of moral education based on caring rather than the
abstract, elusive, and often contradictory moral principles advocated by Bennett. Among
the important claims made by Noddings are the following: A rule based ethic creates the
possibility and often the practice of elevating principle over persons: The practice of
universally applying and imposing abstract principles on concrete situations leads to a
detached objectifying of situations, thus reducing moral decisions to "problems to be
solved," rather than persons to be cared for: This depersonalized approach amounts to
an artificial imposition of abstract principles in a way that does not resemble the actual
reasoning process (i.e., one grounded in the particular affections of actual personal
relations) which characterizes genuine caring: Traditional moral reasoning involves
such philosophically dubious concepts as objectively binding moral obligations, rights,
intrinsic value, and the moral designations of "right" and "wrong": The utilization of
these disputable notions lends itself to manipulation, exploitation, and unresolvable
arguments. Moreover, these traditional notions of morality often fail to serve as effective
motivating forces in generating care and compassion.

Suggestions For Further Study

One area for further study would involve an examination of teachers who have
adopted Bennett's suggestions for moral education and who have employed The Book of
Virtues in their lessons. Such a study might employ a survey questionnaire in an
attempt to discover the various pedagogical strategies that have been used, as well as to
assess the relative success of these approaches.

Another area of study might involve pursuing the question, "do children need
morality?" In a thoughtful and engaging book, Martha Fay explores the question Do
Children Need Religion? In this work, Fay interviews parents to determine how they view the role of religion in a child's emotional, moral, and spiritual development. She includes interviews with parents who favor a religious dimension in their children's development, and those who do not. However, if I were to explore the question of whether or not children need morality, I doubt if I would find many "amoralist" parents who have raised their children without reference to morality. As Richard Garner has written:

I believe that if we could establish this "informed compassionate amoralism" we could leave morality, with its lies and its guilt, with its bogus heteronomy, its capacity for exploitation and rationalization, its unresolvable arguments, and its perpetual flirtation with religion, behind us. Freud was probably right when he called religion a childhood neurosis, but what he didn't say (because he didn't believe it) was that morality is an adolescent one.

Hence, a study of the possibility and desirability of raising children without morality would be largely a theoretical endeavor. However, a study of the works on children's moral development by such writers as Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, and Robert Coles might be helpful.

Another possible line of inquiry would be to develop strategies of applied amoralism for teachers. In making such a suggestion, I am aware that this might be seen by some as "cutting" my proverbial "vocational throat." For example, many philosophers of education have argued that one way of ensuring jobs for those in the profession is to convince administrators of colleges of Education that philosophers possess unique expertise on ethics and moral education. I feel, however, that such fears are unfounded. Holding to a position of amoralism does not preclude the study of ethics. In fact, amoralism presents some exciting possibilities for developing new and innovative strategies for cultivating compassion in students and for enriching the quality of personal relations. Therefore, one step in this direction might be to write a book entitled "Applied Amoralism For Teachers." The work could be modeled after Strike and Solits' work The Ethics of Teaching. It would involve both a theoretical and philosophical explanation of amoralism, and also case studies of ethical problems facing teachers and possible strategies for dealing with these problems.

A final line of study which I would like to pursue concerns Bennett's views on religious values and moral education. In fact, my original proposal for this dissertation was an examination of Bennett's views on religion and education (actually it was my
fourth proposal and the one directly preceding this one). So there is much I could suggest about such a study, but it will have to wait until another time.
CHAPTER NOTES


6. In his recently published book, James Carville lists the “top five ridiculous and pathetic Republicans.” They are: Representative Fred Heineman (R-NC); Representative Newt Gingrich (R-GA); Senator Rick Santorum (R-PA); Lamar Alexander; and Michael Huffington. James Carville, *We’re Right, They’re Wrong: A Handbook For Spirited Progressives* (New York: Random House, 1996).

7. While we are on the subject of assessing the significance of a political figure, I would like to mention a recent article on Pat Buchanan. The article was written while Buchanan was still contending for the 1996 Republican presidential campaign. Stephen Hess, a senior analyst at Washington’s Brooking Institution, who worked with Buchanan in the Nixon White House, gives this assessment of Buchanan’s significance: “I would not think that the history books, at this point, will remember him. If he has a longer history, maybe they will take note. He may be a Ph.D. dissertation for somebody.” Quoted in “Buchanan Keeps Presidential Campaign Lively,” *The Columbus Dispatch* (March 18, 1996). To the best of my knowledge, this study is the first dissertation on either Bennett or Buchanan. That there may have been some competitive tension between Bennett and Buchanan as early as the Reagan years, is indicated in John Judis’ comments on Bennett’s crusade for morality: “When I asked whether he was following the political path of former communications director Patrick Buchanan, Bennett did not reject the comparison—only the attribution of leadership and originality to Buchanan rather than himself. ‘Indeed, I was first,’ he said.” In the “dissertation department,” Bennett is once again “first.” For what that is worth.


9. This charge is made against Bennett and other conservative critics of higher education by Stanley Fish in “Speaking in Code,” *No Such Thing*, pp. 85-101.

10. Weyrich is an old friend of Bennett’s, co-founder of The Heritage Foundation, head of the Free Congress Foundation, and chairman of National Empowerment Television.


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15. "Conservatives worry GOP puts wallet before heart," *The Columbus Dispatch* (1-26-96), 2A.


17. Judis, "Mr. Ed.;" Frank Deford, "The Fabulous Bennett Boys," *Vanity Fair* 57 (August, 1994): 80-86. Bennett's brother, Robert Bennett, is a well known attorney whose clients include Bill Clinton.


21. Perhaps a study of Dewey's accounts of 'interests' and education would provide some helpful insights for developing a pedagogy which integrates the study of popular culture and the classics. See, for example: John Dewey, *Democracy And Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1966), pp. 124-38.


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