

## **Leading Children Beyond Good and Evil**

by **James Davison Hunter**

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Perhaps the enduring subtext in the evolution of moral education in America, and its continuing story to the present, has been a quest for inclusiveness. While the need to provide moral instruction to young people has never been questioned, neither has the impulse to accommodate the ever-growing diversity of moral cultures. In the face of potentially contentious and disrupting cultural differences, theorists and practitioners adopted inclusive accommodation as a strategy to neutralize the likelihood of conflict, since when put into practice, cultural inclusion means that no one's interests are neglected, no one is left out, and, therefore, no one is slighted, snubbed, or offended. William Glasser captured the sum and substance of the quest for our own day as early as 1969 when he stated that "certain moral values can be taught in school *if the teaching is restricted to principles about which there is essentially no disagreement in our society*" (emphasis added).

This has become the unspoken imperative of every school of moral education—psychological, neoclassical, and communitarian. Psychologists interested in the question believe that there is a set of universal dispositions toward justice and other virtues that is innate in every person, at all times and in all cultures, and which proper education can bring out during the formative stages of childhood development. Communitarian and neoclassical moral educators would also point to a universal set of moral virtues and values shared throughout this society and even the world, though they might have slightly different lists (communitarians favor the civic virtues of democratic liberalism, while neoclassical thinkers such as C. S. Lewis and William Bennett favor personal virtues), and they are likely to explain the universal morality in terms of culture rather than innate traits. But every major school of educational theory when reflecting on public moral education agrees that there is a universal and all-inclusive morality.

This consensus in theory is repeated by the large host of educators charged with translating the theories into practice. For instance, William Honig, the former state superintendent of schools in California, insisted that teachers instruct children in the common ethical convictions of the American people, "the ideals and standards we as a society hold to be worthy of praise and emulation." The Character Counts! Coalition also insists that "there are some universal core values that can be taught—values that are not identified with any single political or religious tradition."

How are these values to be identified? In a survey of such efforts, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that "to decide what to teach, state education boards generally round up diverse professionals—who arrive at an acceptable list of values to be taught. Respect, responsibility, compassion, honesty, and civic participation usually head the list." Educators insist, according to E. Dale David, that "a list of civic values consciously chosen by a school system to realize the goal of developing effective citizens is the necessary first step in the teaching of civic values."

In actual communities around the country, the pursuit of "consensus values" has become an undertaking of some urgency. In 1984, the 148 public schools in Baltimore County, Maryland, agreed to teach a common core of twenty-four values

including compassion, courtesy, critical inquiry, due process, equality of opportunity, freedom of thought and action, honesty, human worth and dignity, integrity, justice, knowledge, loyalty, objectivity, order, patriotism, rational consent, reasoned argument, respect for others' rights, responsible citizenship, rule of law, self-respect, tolerance, and truth. Nashville, Tennessee, generated a curriculum covering eighteen "universal virtues" including respect for self, doing what is right, service, respecting others, accepting responsibility, building community, caring, nurturing family and friends, loving learning, taking initiative, modeling democracy, forgiveness, practicing honesty, perseverance, gratitude, courage, solving problems, and respecting work. The Department of Education in New Jersey likewise endorsed a set of core values to be taught in schools, including civic responsibility and respect for oneself and others. A thirty-two member task force in Raleigh, North Carolina, produced a list of eight consensus values. In Howard County, Maryland, a school board approved eighteen values for promotion in schools. It was this sense of need for consensus values that motivated the Character Counts! Coalition to seek broad endorsement of its "Six Core Elements of Character."

The mandate to discover and cultivate "consensus values" has extended to law and public policy as well. Legislatures in Virginia, Alabama, New Hampshire, Georgia, Iowa, Indiana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oregon, Kentucky, and Utah have created or reaffirmed laws that mandate the teaching of commonly held values in their school districts.

In theory and practice, in law and in administrative policies, the quest for an inclusive morality that transcends differences is common to all moral education strategies. As noted above, all strategies-psychological, neoclassical, and communitarian-pursue it. Their advocates all agree with William Bennett that "values can and should be taught in schools without fear of accusations of proselytizing."

And there's the rub. Underlying all of these efforts is the basic fear of "violating historic traditions of secular education" or "lapsing into dogmatic indoctrination." Virginia's statute mandating character education, for example, insists that the law not "be construed as requiring or authorizing indoctrination in any particular religious or political belief." The sensitivity educators have to being accused of "indoctrination" is only partly rooted in a respect for the First Amendment's religion clause. They are no less fearful of violating the imperative to be inclusive. To recognize the differences among different moral communities and take them seriously in moral education is to enter a pluralistic quagmire in which disagreements arise, one's impartiality is challenged, and feelings are hurt. So for understandable reasons, educators retreat from the hard and dicey work of acknowledging and working with these differences.

An inclusive morality, then, is a "safe" morality. To proclaim certain moral norms to be universal-whether because they are rooted in the psychological predispositions of the human person, the anthropological constitution of all human civilizations, or the social contract of a human community-means that these norms are not controversial and will not be contested. The very volatile realm of life we call morality has thus been tamed. And so it is that inclusiveness is the sacred wood of all moral education. Yet while this imperative is apparently beyond dispute, it is not without cost.

The quest for inclusiveness in moral education can be pursued only by emptying lived morality of its particularity-those "thick" normative meanings whose seriousness and authority are embedded within the social organization of distinct

communities and the collective rituals and narratives that give them continuity over time. The net effect of this denial of particularity is to engage in some extraordinary evasions.

Consider, for example, the treatment of moral exemplars in the psychological strategy. Though Lawrence Kohlberg's cognitive developmentalism is unique in that field, his treatment of Martin Luther King, Jr. is typical. King is enshrined as the personification of a "just" human being. In Kohlberg's model, he exemplified "stage six" moral reasoning: autonomous, conscience-oriented morality pointing toward universal principles of justice. Kohlberg acts as though King's race, southern heritage, generational moment, Christian faith, and theological training—all the inconvenient particularities that bore on his leadership in the civil rights movement—were utterly incidental to his vision and his moral courage. They are simply disregarded.

Though the circumstances and issues are different, it is certainly out of the same desire to evade the sticky problem of particularity that the psychological pedagogies avoid addressing the issues of abortion, gender, homosexuality, and the like. These moral matters simply cannot be addressed without getting into the particularities of moral commitment and the traditions and communities that ground those commitments. Knowledge of the cognitive and affective dimensions of moral agency just doesn't provide the resources to address these matters. And so, for all practical purposes, these issues have been defined out of existence in this framework of moral education.

The neoclassical strategy denies particularity as well, but in its own way. In principle, differences of philosophical and religious tradition should be of paramount importance in this strategy, but in practice these differences are glossed over. Its advocates completely ignore the often intense disagreements between Plato and Aristotle, Kant and Mill, Jefferson and Adams, Falwell and John Paul II (and the communities for whom these are merely representatives), and no effort is made to discern the ways to sort through these differences. Of course, where these differences remain, they often do so only as fragments of more full-bodied social and moral systems. Thus when its advocates champion the "Judeo-Christian ethic"—or what C. S. Lewis called "the Tao" (the morality common to all cultures)—they champion an ethic that never existed in reality and now exists only as an ethical abstraction or political slogan.

Communitarians also diminish particularity with the same effect. In principle, of course, an appreciation of the concrete social and normative composition of communities would seem to be essential to any adequate theory of community. In practice, these constitutive elements tend to be downplayed. The reason for this may be that the most influential school of communitarianism—that associated with the journal *The Responsive Community*, edited by Amitai Etzioni—tends to equate its ideal of community with the liberal welfare state. In its political structures one finds the embodiment of the common good, and in its polity of equality and redistributive justice one finds the ideal of civic life. Here, after all, is a manifestation of political consensus that permits the feeling of rootedness and connectedness but avoids most of the unpleasant realities that accompany "thick" associations.

In a politicized understanding of community, particular communities—whether rooted in "lifestyle" or religion—tend to be given short shrift. Particular communities, of course, are often provincial, exclusive, and messy, almost always in some ways restrictive of individual freedom. The kinds of obligations binding together credal

communities, for example, make many Americans and most communitarians nervous, and so they are written off as "puritanical," authoritarian, and extreme. Reluctant to affirm those features of actual communities that often challenge received notions of liberal autonomy, many American communitarians find it easier to embrace a political ideal of community that poses no such challenge. Thus community is championed more in theory than in reality, more as an ideal of liberal universalism than as the diverse relational structures that impose themselves upon us in everyday life.

The denial of particularity extends as well to the way moral educators respond to the "why" questions behind moral agency, the principles that undergird moral action. Why should one be good? Why should one tell the truth rather than lie? Why should one shun cruelty in favor of compassion? Why should one pursue fairness for others when one's own interests are not served? Why should one care for those in need when everyone else around is indifferent? These are natural questions to ask, and not just for children. They point to the deep, long-standing questions at the foundations of moral philosophy.

In 1951, the educational establishment recognized that these "why" questions are "of primary importance." "Children and young people," the National Education Association declared in *Moral and Spiritual Values in the Public Schools*, sometimes annoyingly, want to know *why*. They do not readily believe, or trust, or act upon, the instruction of those who tell them that [there] is no reason at all for preferring one kind of conduct over another, or that any reason at all will do equally well. Nor, if it were pedagogically effective, could the doctrine of "never-mind-why" be acceptable to any but an authoritarian state or a dictatorial school system. On neither pedagogical nor on ideological grounds can the schools ignore the problem of sanctions.

Whether or not this view was widely held at mid-century, it is certainly not taken seriously today. For the most part, moral educators want to believe that the virtues are self-evident goods that need no justification. As Michael Josephson of Character Counts! put it, "I suggest that it doesn't really matter how we answer the question. No one seriously questions the virtue of virtues or doubts that honesty is better than dishonesty, fairness is better than unfairness, kindness is better than cruelty, and moral courage is superior to cowardice and expediency." He suggests that the challenge implicit in the "Why be ethical?" question "may arise more from a need to find an excuse for moral shortcomings than from a genuine desire to satisfy philosophical curiosity."

In the rare instances when moral educators address the theoretical question, their answers are consistent with the model of inclusiveness they advocate. The psychologically oriented moral educator argues that moral virtue is an intrinsic need, and when we satisfy this need by being kind or compassionate, we feel good about ourselves. The neoclassical educator will appeal to the consensus of history or anthropology and say that it is "natural" for us to conform to these standards. The communitarian educator will point to the social contract and say that we are better off when we share in the will of the people. All these responses are as generalized as the morality they espouse. The aim is to offend no one and satisfy as many as possible.

At least as often, we are told that arguments for morality are unproductive and therefore unnecessary. One textbook in the 1970s put it this way: "When

controversial issues or values choices are discussed, some questions are to be avoided. . . . 'Why' questions, while sometimes justified, risk pushing students who have no clear reasons for their choices into fabricating a reason." Established opinion has not changed since then. As Rheta DeVries and Betty Zan explained more recently in *Moral Classrooms, Moral Children* (1994), "The child (and often the adult as well) is unlikely to have any idea about why he or she feels or behaves in a certain manner. Thus, we suggest that it is ineffective to ask the child, 'Why do you do this?'" The historical and empirical problem is that the reasons "why one should be good" are many. Their stubborn plurality signals just the kinds of irreducible differences that cannot be homogenized into an encompassing morality. In response to the question "Why be good?" or "Why not be cruel?" a commitment to inclusiveness limits one to awkward silence.

In sum, an inclusive moral education does not result in the absence of morality, but rather a morality emptied of meaning, significance, authority. The effort to be inclusive reduces morality to the thinnest of platitudes, severed from the social, historical, and cultural contexts that make it concrete and ultimately compelling. Virtues are presented as ungrounded generalities that can be found in various social organizations and cultural traditions but are essentially independent of them. Without being anchored in any normative community, this morality retains little authority beyond its own aesthetic appeal.

As a result, the very vocabulary of right and wrong, good and bad, justice and injustice becomes, for all practical purposes, obsolete, because these words share fewer and fewer points of reference. Neologisms from the moral education establishment like "pro-social" are only the most overt and self-conscious attempts to avoid the awkwardness of words like "good" and "evil." The words central to our moral frame of reference have lost much of their power to make sense of experience, while at the same time, by inventing a new vocabulary, the moral education establishment literally creates a new way of seeing reality. We end up with an epistemology and moral vocabulary that is effectively beyond good and evil. Consider, for example, the word "character." Within professional psychology and the therapeutic establishment, the concept of character was long ago rejected in favor of the concept of personality. The problem with "character" was that it bore ethical and metaphysical implications that professional psychology could not rationally explain or justify. Character, after all, is either good or bad, whereas personality is fascinating or boring, forceful or weak, attractive or unattractive. When character was disqualified as a legitimate way of thinking about the person, our concept of the self lost a measure of moral significance. The neoclassical and communitarian moral theorists define themselves in principled opposition to the psychological regime on just this point. But because they too insist on moral inclusivity-considering the individual person generically, either prior to or apart from his community and culture-they also undermine the metaphysical, ethical, and social particularities that ground the self and make it specific. The unwitting effect is to position moral agency within a social, historical, and cultural vacuum. The individual is left with few other resources than his or her mind and emotions, the moral justification for various actions.

There have never been "generic" values, though this is what contemporary moral education strives to teach. But is this really a problem? Why should we worry about the specifics-especially since we are so likely to disagree on them-as long as we are united around the overall norms?

Charles Taylor, who posed this question in his book *The Sources of the Self*, has suggested that it is the particularities that lead us to the sources of morality, the sources that sustain our commitment to goodness and fair play. It is one thing to affirm general standards of goodness, he says, and quite another to be motivated by a strong understanding "that human beings are eminently *worth* helping or treating with justice." High ethical standards, Taylor argues, require strong sources. Without them, there is little imperative and no direction for moral action.

Take empathy as an example. For many moral educators, it is our capacity to imagine ourselves in the situation of others that is the source of our moral sentiments. Empathy thus becomes the foundation of an ethical life. And it is through our capacity to imagine the suffering of others, even those in circumstances that are utterly alien to us, that we learn compassion and mercy.

The argument cannot and should not be dismissed. Empathy indeed serves as an aid to understanding and a motive to enacting justice. But when it is decontextualized—lifted out of the framework of embedded habits and moral traditions—empathy can become indiscriminate. Detached from the concrete habits and ideals that ground particular moral communities, empathy would not enable a person to discriminate among competing kinds of suffering. With whom do we stand in solidarity, offering our energy and resources? Somalian refugees? Upper-middle-class women who are victims of workplace discrimination? Spotted owls in endangered habitats? Gun owners who fear their rights are threatened? Holocaust survivors? In an age saturated with media accounts of tragedy and suffering, we have many stories that produce a fleeting emotion, but few that evoke anything more lasting. Empathy on its own simply does not lead to consistent, enduring, or discriminating moral commitments. Indeed, it can lead to just the opposite. As Bernard Williams observed, "If it is a mark of a man to have a conceptualized and fully conscious awareness of himself as one among others, aware that others have feelings like himself, this is a precondition not only of benevolence but (as Nietzsche pointed out) of cruelty as well."

When moral rules and selves are abstracted from the normative traditions that give them substance and the social contexts that makes them concrete, "values" become little more than sentiments, moral judgments, expressions of individual preference. In such a framework, the defining moral action is the capacity of the individual to choose as he or she sees fit. The individual is capable of making commitments, of course, but these commitments are not binding, since one always retains the right of withdrawal. The highest normative ideal, trumping all others, is the ideal of an individual free to move among multiple attachments, and the merit of those attachments is measured by the degree to which they facilitate personal well-being. Unanchored as they are to anything concrete outside the self, the values and virtues encouraged by the leading strategies of moral education provide meager resources at best for sustaining and supporting our far-reaching moral commitments to benevolence and justice.

When moral discourse is taken out of the particularity of the moral community—the social networks and rituals that define its practice, the *weltanschauung* that gives it significance and coherence, and the communal narrative that forms its memory—both the self and the morality it seeks to inculcate operate in a void. Filling the void, in part, is a system of rules, laws, procedures, and entitlements designed to ensure due process among individuals and groups who are assumed to be maximizing their interests. Myriad good intentions stand behind each federal and state regulation and

behind each court order. But here too there are unintended consequences. In such an environment, the very idea of "developing values," "cultivating character," or generating "good" human beings is difficult to imagine, much less realize.

It is worth stepping back for a moment to consider briefly the larger cultural context within which the vagaries of contemporary moral education are worked out. The structure and content of moral education, after all, have not emerged out of thin air. My contention here is that in ways that are certainly unintended, the dominant strategies of moral education today both exemplify and carry forward the distinctive elements of Romantic modernism.

Romantic modernism is a complex phenomenon—a philosophy, an aesthetic, an ethic, and even a mythic ideal all at the same time. Its roots trace to certain streams of Enlightenment thought, and throughout the nineteenth century it found expression in such wide-ranging movements as Transcendentalism, Abstract Impressionism, and the literature of Arnold, Whitman, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Hawthorne, and Melville. In the twentieth century, the same impulse has found a voice in liberal religious thought, the Beat movement, and humanistic psychotherapy.

In their most basic contours, the philosophy and literature of Romantic modernism derived from traditional theology. The movement sought to sustain the inherited cultural order of Christianity but without its dogmatic understructure. The problem, of course, was that orthodox theology was no longer tenable in an age dominated by speculative rationality and progressive humanism. Among the urban, well-educated classes, traditional dogma and its assorted pieties had to be abandoned. Yet the moral ideals that Christendom had bequeathed to the late eighteenth and nineteenth century—ideals such as benevolence, civility, and justice—all retained a deep existential relevance. The task, then, was to reconstitute moral philosophy to make it intellectually acceptable as well as emotionally and spiritually fitting to the times. To do this, the traditional Christian narrative and its central concepts were demythologized and reconceived.

Particularly in the nineteenth century, Romanticism evolved into a Neoplatonized Christianity in which all of the core concepts of biblical theology were transformed into ethical universals. God "the Father" was displaced by a notion of an impersonal first principle—variously understood as "mind" or "spirit." Divine perfection was equated with the notion of a natural, self-sufficient, and undifferentiated unity in the cosmos. Likewise, traditional concepts of evil, represented by rebellion against a holy deity, were transmogrified into notions of a "division" and "estrangement." In this, Romantic modernists did not so much discard the old myths as translate them into the conceptual framework of an agnostic and intuitive humanism.

At the heart of this reconstitution of theology and moral philosophy was an attempt to relocate the source of moral value and significance. The earliest streams of Romantic modernism found this source in a high view of Nature, with the person as part of the natural order. Traditional theological conceptions of human nature were turned inside out: each self was a "portal of the divine," a natural repository of inborn qualities, capacities, and talents, not least of which was a disposition toward good will, kindheartedness, fair play, and so on. Since Nature was unquestionably good, so was human nature—no Fall here. But for all the Romantics' efforts to establish metaphysical grounds for this view, they could never move significantly beyond a persistent subjectivism. The early Romantics eventually abandoned their metaphysical aspirations and concluded instead that the only conceivable source of

value and purpose was the autonomous self. "Nature" and any other deity man professed were projections of human values rather than their source. It was precisely because the self was the locus of values that the Romantics believed a person could read a work of literature or encounter a work of art and recognize its moral and aesthetic significance. The good inherent in the work was validated internally through qualities the observer or reader naturally possessed. The same could be said for the ethical significance of history. It too would be validated by intrinsic structures of morality latent within the person. To cultivate good in the world it was only necessary to encourage inborn dispositions and capabilities into their full development.

This imperative-to draw out the latent potentialities innate to the self-has been and remains central to the moral cosmology of Romantic modernism. It is from this imperative that its ethic of self-actualization derives. This imperative also defined the terms through which Romantic modernists leveled their critique of the contemporary world. Given their assumptions, the essence of their critique is not surprising. If the authentic self is defined largely through its autonomy from the collective standards of social propriety and aesthetic judgment, then conformity to collective expectations is a sign of the self's distortion and even corruption. In principle, anything that repressed emotion, constricted individual autonomy, or violated the individual's expressive freedom undermined the development of the self's natural endowments and capabilities.

Dominated as it is by the impersonal forces of bureaucratic rationality, contemporary society is especially given to the repression of personal needs and interests. The goal, then, would be to liberate the individual from all constraints. Institutions still exist, of course, but their legitimacy now depends upon their capacity to accommodate the expressive needs of the individual. With this reorientation, not only would people be restored but society itself would be renewed in the process. In this, the ethical reconstitution of traditional moral theology in Romantic modernism is complete: because human beings are defined by their capacity to create a meaningful world, it is human beings who must, in the end, redeem that world.

Even in its diversity and conflict, contemporary moral education bears more than a passing resemblance to this cosmology of Romantic modernism. In the case of the dominant psychological approach to moral education, the fit is nearly perfect. The psychological strategy fully shares its optimistic assumptions about the inherent benevolence abiding in all people, the moral significance of the individual's expressive needs, the absolute moral priority of the unhindered and unencumbered individual over the exigencies of the group, as well as its antipathy toward social convention and traditional institutions. Whether or not its proponents are aware of it, the psychological strategy of moral education faithfully translates the assumptions and ideals of Romantic modernism into its theoretical literature and practical pedagogy.

Though there are clear points of resistance, the neoclassical and communitarian strategies share affinities with Romantic modernism as well. In practice, as we have seen, they offer no real alternative but instead operate with many of the same assumptions and techniques as the psychological model. Yet in principle there are significant differences between the neoclassical and communitarian strategies and the dominant psychological model, especially in their view of institutions. Whether referring to the community, the family, the canon, or the "bag of virtues" that Kohlberg derided, neoclassical and communitarian educators all accord these

traditional institutions and influences much greater legitimacy and authority in the moral development of children. In principle they would want to bring young people into conformity with their standards.

But even if their principled embrace of objective values and strong institutions were realized in practice, it would be incapacitated by their unqualified commitment to inclusiveness. In their rejection of particularity, they end up advocating a morality of abstract universals, a Neoplatonic morality disengaged from history, culture, and society.

Once again, we see that the different strategies of moral education do not so much offer distinct options of moral instruction as emphasize different themes within the same broad moral philosophy. The dominant stream, however, tends toward an anti-metaphysical perspective, viewing the self as the autonomous source of order, beauty, and virtue unsupported by any social or cosmic order.

Seeing moral education in this larger cultural context brings at least two ironies into relief. The first, of course, is that the subjectivism and emotivism of the psychological strategy—so pervasive in all models and institutions of moral instruction—reflects a moral cosmology that is not so universal after all. The quest for an inclusive morality has succeeded only in propagating a moral culture with its own distinctive set of prejudices and its own distinct method of indoctrination. It feels inclusive only to those who share its assumptions and moral horizons.

The final irony has to do with the role of moral education in the larger society. The purpose of moral education is to change people for the better and, in so doing, to improve the quality of life in society; individually and collectively, we are to become better people than we might otherwise be. The difficulty is that moral education, as it is presently configured and institutionalized, is utterly captive to the society in which it exists. It embodies too well the normative assumptions that have brought the social order to its present place and that continue to maintain it. It is, in so many respects, a reflection of the moral order it seeks to transcend and then transform. In this regard it is clear that moral education, even in its diversity and its oppositions, is more a story about the legitimation of American culture than it is about its transformation; as in every generation in America, the substance of moral education has reflected the central assumptions and ideals of the prevailing zeitgeist.

But surely this is not all that can be said. Implicit in the word "character" is a story. It is a story about living for a purpose that is greater than the self. Though this purpose resides deeply within, its origins are outside the self and so it beckons one forward, channeling one's passions to mostly quiet acts of devotion, heroism, sacrifice, and achievement.

These purposes, and the narrative in which they are embedded, translate character into destiny. In so doing they also establish the horizons of the moral imagination—the expanse of the good that can be envisioned. The moral excellences of character, then, are not the end toward which one strives but rather a means. At the same time, the moral disciplines within which one is habituated *are* enactments of the purposes to which one is called, embodiments of the vision to which one is committed.

The vision itself is imbued with a quality of sacredness. The standards by which one lives and the purposes to which one aspires have a coherence and an inviolability about them, but they are coherent and inviolable only when joined to a community. The narrative behind "character" integrates the self within communal purposes, binding dissimilar others to common ends. Character outside of a lived community,

the entanglements of complex social relationships and their shared story, is impossible.

The nostalgia for those grand, encompassing stories is high in our day, and yet nearly everything in our culture undermines their credibility. It is not just the skepticism of intellectuals or the inadequacies of moral education but the structural and cultural realities of our society in this historical moment that make us doubt any kind of transcending narrative. There is no reversal of history or simple recovery of older virtues. American culture is defined more and more by an absence, and in that absence, we provide children with no moral horizons beyond the self and its well-being. In spite of good intentions, our best efforts lead children uncomfortably close to Nietzsche's "last men," who have little aspiration beyond "pitiable comfort."

This is not to say that we have seen the last of character or the moral qualities of which it is made. It will be found, here and there, in pockets of social life-within families and communities that still, against all odds, embody and enact a moral vision. Needless to say, it will manifest itself culturally in various and particular ways. In such settings people will not merely acquire techniques of moral improvement but rather find themselves encompassed within a story that defines their own purposes within a shared destiny, one that points toward aims that are higher and greater than themselves.

For parents and other adults the task of "saving our children" means, in large part, telling children what they are being saved for. The task of educating children means teaching them the larger designs that could give form and focus to their individual and collective aspirations, so that they come to understand not only how to be good but why. And though it is made explicit from time to time, this moral vision is communicated and reinforced mainly through the enactments of the particular lives, traditions, and institutions that constitute the living memory of our communities.

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