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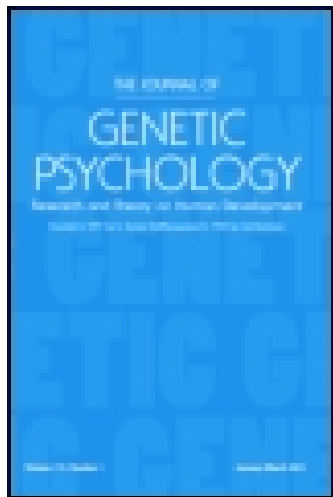
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THE IDEALS OF ETHICAL CULTURE FOR CHILDREN

By DAVID MUZZEY, PH. D.

I have no deep philosophical reflections to offer you this morning on the training of the child, but think it will be best if I tell you of what we are trying to do in our Society in New York.

So far as I know, the School for Ethical Culture, of which I am a teacher, is the only school in the country in which direct, ethical instruction is given, from the very earliest grades to the very highest. For a number of years that has been true. In 1892 Professor Felix Adler, the founder, wrote his book on the moral training of children, in which he outlines a course of ethical instruction for what we call the primary and intermediate grades in our secondary school. Since that time we have added a high school course of four years, and now we are going even beyond the high school grades in organizing groups for young married people, vocational groups of young lawyers, young physicians, business men, etc., and adult groups generally. Of course, the school is the chief medium of our instruction and about 450 to 500 students are enrolled in the school.

We have Sunday-school work also, different, of course, because the fundamental position that we take in the Ethical Culture Society is the supremacy of ethics, of morals, over any form, to reveal religion or dogmatic teaching in any way. We do not neglect the Bible. It is taught carefully but, naturally from our point of view, we regard it as an historical document, taking its place with all the other records of revealed religion that have been made to man.

Now the fundamental principle in our teaching is to train the child to enter a changing, improving society; and, more than that, to train him to be a conscious agent in pushing on the work of change and improvement. A great deal of our present-day education follows frankly the competitive ideal of our civilization, training the child to get as much as he can in wealth and position, training him to be successful—successful being interpreted to mean making his way, getting his place; so in fact the phrase "making a living" has come to mean almost completely making money, though we know, of course,

that a living is much more than money. I attended the graduation exercises in two large schools in New York, in both of which the whole emphasis was placed on, to my mind, very low competitive ideals. Boys were complimented for having beaten the other boys in the school and given medals. They were made to feel that their course was successful because they had beaten somebody else, which ideal permeated the whole exercises. Now we do not believe in that. We believe in competition in service rather than gain for one's self. And we attempt to teach the children that their success in the world does not mean what they can get out of it, or how many of their fellows they can pass in the race for position, but it means how much they can contribute by a correct, cultivated balance, trained and shaped to do the work of helping on the world's evolution toward good. This is the fundamental and basal character of our teaching in the Ethical Culture School and Sunday-School. Instead of ignoring the child's individuality and emphasizing an order outside the school into which he will go some day and to which he must adapt himself in order to be successful in it, we emphasize the child's character which will be potent enough when he gets out into the world to change that order. We put the emphasis on the child in school, to change the world, and not on the adaptability of the child to the order which he will enter when he graduates.

We believe our instruction differs very largely from that of France and Germany, in this respect—that it is completely divorced from any theological implications. In France, ethical culture, which has been in vogue in the schools for more than twenty-five years, has been mainly promoted by anti-clerical considerations, and the ethics have been introduced as a make-weight against religion. To be sure, since 1900 there has been an improvement in that respect. Nevertheless, all movements bear for many years the traces of the spirit in which they were conceived and the French movement bears still very largely the spirit of anti-clericalism. On the other hand, the German education goes to the opposite extreme, and the ethics teaching there is nil. They simply have biblical instruction, the object being to train the child in the accepted religious creed of the state.

We simply recommend to the child as far as we can the idea of moral progress, of ethical progress, proceeding out of his conception of the great movement of the world toward ethical consciousness.

As to our curriculum, in the early years, the first two grades, we make use of fairy tales, animal stories, in which there is discoverable a moral element, for example—*The Red Rose and the White Rose*, and *Red Riding Hood*. Then we proceed to a

study of the family relations, as the child wakes up in the sixth or eighth year to an idea of his place as a member of the family and begins to realize that there are responsibilities toward sister and brother, father and mother. We discuss family relations, the provisions of the mosaic code, the Odyssey with its picture of Greek family life. Then we proceed in the intermediate school to give the children glimpses of the historical development of morality. We present something of Socrates and his view of life, of Plato and the Roman state with its struggle between the orders, of the triumph of the Plebeian classes over the Patrician—all presented, of course, in simple language. As the child's interest widens from his purely self-centred little soul to the family, then out to his playmates and perhaps the town in which he lives, we try to go on giving him this historic material to help develop the ideas that we wish to inculcate. In the higher school we begin with some extracts from the penal code of New York State. Now we want to show the child at this transitional moment the responsibility of the individual to the community, on the one hand, and also to show the work of the individual in that these methods have been for his direction, and to cultivate the correct attitude in his mind to classes that offend against society. This occupies in all a few weeks and forms a very good introduction to the main subject matter of the high school, which presents the relation of the individual to the state, especially in the aspect of the individual obligation to such moral and ethical provisions as the State finds it necessary to insert in its codes. Of course, this spreads out into a very wide field. Slavery, for instance, ancient and mediæval, and slavery in the South are discussed in order to cultivate the right attitude in the child toward human oppression. The labor question of the present time is touched upon. We try to stimulate the child to train his will rather than his intellect, to make him feel that our civilization is not the solid thing he might have thought it, but is a mighty intertwining of human wills, that some are diseased, some weak and some noble. The problem is how to excite his admiration for the best.

In the second year, we go on to a little more personal subject: the relation of the child, the threefold relation, to those whom he meets,—his attitude to his superiors, to his equals, and to the undeveloped inferiors, or the less fortunate than he. Under that triple heading, we have a very rich course indeed in the training of the child in his *milieu*. The object is to get the child to know society, to know that he has a great mission to perform in that society when he has graduated.

Then we go on with the vocational ethics course. When the child reaches the junior year of the high school, he is be-

ginning to think of what he is to do in life, and the problem of his vocation comes home to him. This involves introspection—his individual fitness, his ability, his adaptability to the position in life which he hopes to occupy. So he is taught both self-appreciation and humility. He is taught to estimate himself as well as he can in the light of the previous training he has had on the different grades of society.

And we go on the fourth year to the broadest of the courses: namely, the relation of the individual to the state. And there we treat the matter historically, showing that is how the state instead of being the external, objective entity it seems is the combination of good men and women like himself, and we train him to look forward to taking his place as a good citizen.

I think that will show you much better than any philosophical reflections I could indulge in what the Ethical Culture Society stands for, how much it believes in children and attributes to their inborn nature, and how little it relies upon what seems to it the adventitious periods of the formulated morality of the past. I know there are serious objections raised to the direct teaching of ethics in the schools. Perhaps no one has voiced those objections more cogently than Professor Palmer of Harvard. We differ, of course, completely with Professor Palmer; when he says, for example, that the teaching of ethics to children is likely to make prigs of them, when he maintains that the child is not interested until the college age in ethics, we think he is wrong. I think we have amply proved in our work that this is wrong. We do find the child interested from the very early days, and interested in discussing the right and wrong of things. We believe, and think we have ample reason for it, that leaving the child alone and not bringing it face to face with the consideration of these questions is to neglect the child, and that the habits that are formed are not blind and holy habits but blind and selfish habits. And so we take advantage of the youth of the race to impress these lessons. We do not believe, for example, in the principle that has been so overdone, of the child repeating the experience of the race. I think it is evident that a child eleven or twelve years of age has very much more experience, mental and moral experience, than the adult in the early years of the race, and I think we make a grave mistake when we think that our young children are not considering these problems. It is not a question of making the child a prig, but of making him a man. A striking illustration came to me the other day. My own boy of six is in the school and the question came up in the first grade class of truthfulness and of the effect on the child of disobeying; and the teacher told the story of the children who were playing in their mother's room;

the mother told them not to open a certain drawer. They opened it, but hearing their mother coming back, they shut the drawer; and there was no evidence when she came in that they had disobeyed her. The teacher said: "How do you think those children should feel?" They gave what they supposed would be the right answer: "I should think they would cry;" "I should think they would never do it again;" etc. But my boy said: "Well, I should think if they shut the drawer already before the mother came in and didn't say anything, I don't see how she could know that they had been in the drawer."

Institutions that train in the ethical and moral life appeal to adults, to people, in other words, with ethical and moral life. We have passed from the stage of being too young for these things, and we are rapidly coming to the point where we believe that our civilization will be made up of the whole of our best men and women who have had in their youth the shaping which the church faintly often strives to give them in their age. In other lines except the schools, we are awaking to that fact.

In New York State on the first of September a law will go into effect making it impossible to call a child under sixteen years of age a criminal. In other words, children who commit criminal offenses under sixteen years will be dealt with as moral delinquents rather than being punished as criminals. From September, 1902, to the present about 8,200 cases came before the children's court in New York. You know, of course, that the children's court deals with children as mistaken rather than as morally bad. And these children were sent to reformatories and given in charge of various curing officers; and as a result 7,100 were completely healed and sent on the path of good citizenship. But I imagine this is only one of the indications that we are waking up all along the line to this tremendous fact that the time for the moral training and ethical consideration is youth and not middle age or even dawning manhood. It is youth. Now this is the training that we are devoted to in this school.

We do not attempt to train them in the theory of ethics. We provide a safety-valve in action for them always. We follow their interest in well doing as well as in correct thinking. We do shun the danger so much feared, the danger that the instructor will simply pour in his ideas on the child, leaving them to ferment in the poor child's brain. We have provided against that. We have direct charities connected with the school. Dr. Eliot is also the head of the Hudson Guild in New York. The children work for hospitals. They carry gifts; they visit reformatories and study them. They have

ample opportunity to put into practice these questions, taken up in the second year of the high school, of their proper relations toward their equals, their superiors, and delinquents. We have teachers in charge of each class whose duty it is to guide the social and moral life of that class. We let them imitate in speech and action all heroes, especially at our festivals.