

Laval théologique et philosophique



Values Education, Adult Ethics and Logic

Lucien Morin

Volume 39, Number 3, octobre 1983

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/400051ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/400051ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Faculté de philosophie, Université Laval

ISSN

0023-9054 (print)

1703-8804 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Morin, L. (1983). Values Education, Adult Ethics and Logic. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 39(3), 327–332. <https://doi.org/10.7202/400051ar>

VALUES EDUCATION, ADULT ETHICS AND LOGIC

Lucien MORIN

RÉSUMÉ. — Il est au moins deux raisons majeures pour placer l'éducation aux valeurs au centre de tout projet d'éducation des adultes: 1) d'un point de vue moral, l'éducation aux valeurs nécessite l'engagement de toutes les forces créatrices de la personne et affecte la bonification et l'amélioration de la personne tout entière; 2) d'un point de vue logique, l'éducation aux valeurs suppose polarité et polarisation — ce qui permet la contrariété nécessaire au dialogue et au raisonnement adultes.

THERE ARE a number of ways in which to justify the place of values in adult education. Two of them have been privileged for the purposes of this article: 1. from a moral point of view, values education is a being-becoming fulfillment affecting the adult as a whole person; 2. from a logical point of view, values education exhibits polarity and polarization, allowing for the contrast required in adult reasoning and dialogue.

1. *Values education as a being-becoming fulfillment
affecting the entire person*

Behind any values education concept there lies a fundamental principle of bipolarity. On the one hand, values are not always "man-created", but are recognized. In other words, a value is not, properly speaking, the easy product of some arbitrary choice nor the result of some mental caprice or fancy. Besides being man-made, value is also man-recognized, something which imposes itself upon man's faculties and to which he can only respond. On the other hand, values take on real significance through existential embodiment. Value cannot be said to have real meaning unless and until it is incarnated, invested with human form; embodied in the daily routine of being, and acting, and becoming. There is nothing mystical nor abstract about this: show me how you live your values and you will show me who you are.

This second element of the principle of bipolarity — the first will be considered in the logic argument — is of capital importance when it comes to education since, obviously, one does not inculcate values as one teaches mathematics. Because it must be invested with flesh, so to speak, that is, integrated in and personified through behaviour, value is quite distinct from a technical or scientific aptitude, habit, or power — or any cognitive disposition for that matter — developed through a formal educational process. First, for its development and acquisition, value implies the energetic commitment of the entire person — which is not usually the case when competence in a particular science or technical skill is the objective. Second, contrary to science or technology, whose more immediate result consists in perfecting the learner *qua* learner, an incarnated value affects the fulfillment and amelioration of the entire person. Briefly stated, through science or technology, knowledge arises. Through value man emerges. The implications for adult education are considerable. Let us briefly examine some of them.

a) *Values education implies the total commitment of the person*

Concrete incarnation being its destiny, value requires the contribution and collaboration not only of the cognitive powers of the mind but all the energies and vital capacities of heart and soul. Through and because of value, these various manifestations give structure and unity, orientation and meaning to man as being. As such, value is the connecting element producing wholeness or completeness.

Men are usually detached from scientific or technological truths, and can know different kinds of facts independently of each other. Even though common first principles underlie all scientific investigation, the content of one science can be intellectually separated from the content of another without mental anguish. The definitions proper to each individual science are not interrelated or mutually connected: as “evident” propositions, that is as lacking a unifying middle term, they cannot share an inter-causal relationship. This is precisely not the case with values for values adhere together and produce an almost automatic total world outlook. Because they are not established as scientific facts, values cannot be freely detached from each other, and held in comfortable isolation.

The reason why values cling to one another in an inseparable whole is because they are incarnated. And being incarnated supposes that they are totally interdependent, regarding both their acquisition and maintenance: an intimate connection unites them in their matter and in their principles. Regarding matter or substance, for example, a narrow, naturally unbreachable contract with the concept of “good” practically cements their family ties. In other words educating to values is nothing else than educating to the multiple facets of the good. Concerning principles, the degree of integrity required for a value to be fully incarnated is so imperious and intense, that each value demands of the entire person that he act according to the highest standards, at all times, in all circumstances, and notwithstanding any and all inclinations to the contrary, no matter how compelling. For instance, the generous adult must be ready not only to confront and dominate the petulant passions of avarice and egoism, but he must also be able to surmount the obstacles that can arise

from his respect for others, his striving for excellence, his openness to beauty, etc. The same must be said of every value. When it comes to incarnated values, a firm and total commitment of the person in one sector of human action presupposes a like commitment in all related sectors. Good intention, which serves as a principle in the election of incarnated values, cannot be partially realized. The whole person, with all its faculties, is at the root of each incarnated value.

b) *Values education effects the bettering of the entire person*

If, for its acquisition, value depends on the total energies of an individual, one must promptly add that from the point of view of consequence or effect, an incarnated value betters not the mind alone, but the entire person.

An education centered principally on intellectual or cognitive learning would not necessarily lead to a bettering of the total man. On the contrary, it would essentially mean the progress or amelioration of man in one of his "parts" — man in his function as knower. For instance, if it is man who mends my shoe, we nevertheless call him a cobbler. It is also man who treats my sick liver or stomach, but he is remunerated as doctor, not as man. So that John-doctor is not identical to John-good-man. Said differently, when what is at stake concerns the goodness of the man John, his fullness and perfection as man, "all" of John is involved — the bettering is not, cannot, must not be partial. Giving with the hand does not make a good hand: it makes a good man. On the contrary, when it comes to medicine, if John-learning is always man, it nevertheless is John-doctor that results in the acquisition of medical qualities and aptitudes. So that, no matter how good he is as a professional, John-doctor could stay John-good-doctor and at the same time be John-bad-man.

Clearly, limiting the education of the adult to intellectual learning or development is not sufficient. Only value can better the entire person. We might go further and suspect that sheer intellectual concentration could even have negative effects on an adult's total well-being. For example, does it not happen that the same object, while a principle of intellectual delight for the mind can, considered in itself, be a source of repugnance for the bettering of the whole man? This is because the intellect can take great pleasure in cogitating evil — for all knowledge, as such, rejoices the intellect. But who would say that, under the pretext of rational development, an adult should be encouraged to amuse himself in imagining and planning say, a perfect crime of murder. This is clearly one case where the good of intelligence is not good for the whole man.

Finally, as we have already suggested, values share natural cohesion and complicity. One cannot be just if he is not, at the same time, honest. Of course, one can, without possessing the incarnated value of honesty, feel a strong, natural inclination to do justice to one's human brother. But basically, if one is not at the same time honest, if one is incapable of controlling himself when temptations of calumny or slander arise, one will forever remain exposed to difficulties when facing the problem of being just. The converse is also true. The interdependence of values is

such that any incarnated value, because of its causal influence on the others, contributes to the betterment of the whole person.

One can quickly see that this particular interpretation of values education is extremely difficult and demanding, especially as regards adult education. But also extremely beneficial. For mature adults especially, those we feel have "made it", a conversion to incarnated value is much more laborious and painful than an intellectual conversion to truth — which can satisfy logic alone without changing behaviour. Only the former implies a reshaping, a refocussing of the total being. To summarize, values education should play a crucial role in all adult education because values imply the commitment and the bettering of the entire person.

2. *Values education allows for polarity and contrast
indispensable to adult reasoning*

Let us recall the first element of the bipolarity principle. A value, it was said, is not the facile product of some arbitrary choice nor the result of mental invention. Rather, value is also and often something which imposes itself upon man's faculties and to which he can only respond. This principle sheds new light on our problem for, as an imposition from "elsewhere", value expresses reality as existing outside the self. As such, it means opposition, polarity, antithesis. It offers an alternative to subjective egocentrism by introducing within the epistemic structure of the mind the possibility of "objective" consciousness. From a strictly logical point of view, reason is doubly served here. For one, it is forced into submission by accepting that many worlds exist which are not identified with, nor caused by, the self. This is the first step toward the recognition of and the respect for the values of the other. For another, it is brought to realize that continuous, subjective affirmation is not conducive to progress. Real human progress, in other words, is always wedged in compromise, reconciliation and dialogue. Development then of the rational powers that make one adult comes about only through dialectics that is, through the consideration and use of contrasting views and values. It is in this sense that values education can be useful to adult reasoning.

And what do we mean by adult reasoning? As far back as the pre-Socratics, valid adult reasoning has been identified as the process through which reason draws from objects of seemingly contrasting nature, common and invariable elements of unity. The rational is community inherent in contrasting objects. A rational principle is one that allows the construction of unity out of a plethora of contrasts. This construction is produced by the insistence upon common characteristics shared by the opposing objects.

This simple definition dominates the history of both Occidental and Oriental thought. It is particularly enlightening for our topic. First, no matter the nature of the unitary theories, no matter their methodology, it seems obvious that the reason for Reason is the connection of disparate items. Reason must recognize contrast before it can manifest principles of similitude; that is, before it can make the distinction between things as they are in themselves and the affirmations and

negations that reason says of them. Practically, Reason presumes that differences exist, differences which she has not caused to be differences, and which are independent of and anterior to her own existence. Finally, every man, precisely because of his rationality, must tackle the laborious task of discovering and elucidating principles of unity in order to escape the insignificance of a world of plural contrasts, plural objects, plural values. For an adult then, values education presents a world totally different from *his* world. Once he recognizes this, he knows that he cannot avoid dealing with this existential contradiction. In the process, his entire person benefits.

As an agent generating doubt in the mind of the adult, values education can produce attentive listening to contrasting opinions and the respectful consideration of their premisses — dialogue. And as long as values are not simply presented in an enumerative, juxtaposed, or uncritical fashion, as long as they are not condemned beforehand to the realm of gelatinous relativism, they entail the kind of adversity indispensable to intellectual growth and perfection. They are at least two important reasons why the perception and analysis of contrast and adversity require intelligence. First, the matter out of which values are made, their very substance, is of such complexity that no one can advance sure-footedly without an awareness that many possible interpretations can exist. Secondly, it is by reason of the inherent weakness of intelligence itself that this precautionary inquest is rendered necessary. Otherwise, if our major difficulties came from things themselves rather than from intelligence, wouldn't we better know those objects that are most abstract by definition? Of course, experience testifies to the contrary.

To summarize, knowledge of truth grows in proportion to the effort of reason in studying the origins of doubt or contrary opinions. In this sense, values education can be a most valuable contribution to logical development. We will conclude this article by illustrating one of these benefits to logic : prudence.

In one of his remarkable essays entitled "On the utility of one's enemies", Plutarch points out a very interesting ingredient in man's intellectual evolution. As regards their contacts with animals, primitive men, says he, were satisfied not to be killed or harmed by them ; consequently, they devoted all their energies to hiding or running away. The idea was to avoid predatory beasts in any possible way. But as time went on, men grew wiser. For then, not only did man avoid being harmed by savage beasts, he discovered ways to profit from his natural enemies ; by learning to eat their flesh, to cloak himself with their skins, to create protective shields out of their hides, even to use parts of the animals as medicinal treatment. Man became so dependent upon them that if the animals were to become extinct, man would also inevitably disappear, depending as he did for his existence on those very beasts that he had once so feared.

Similarly, says Plutarch, there are some men who content themselves with running away from their enemies. Others, much wiser, learn how to utilize them and profit from them. The fact is, Plutarch continues, a smart enemy will only attack our faults and weaknesses. So that enemies can be real beneficial in so far as they

oblige us to constantly be wary, to avoid drastic action or unprepared commitments — to face up to opposition and contradiction. Enemies make us prudent.

Just as the enemy can invite prudence and, by the same token, moral regeneration, so too, logical contradiction can generate intellectual prudence in the examination of truth. Values education in adult education is a sign of wisdom. For, as Montaigne writes: “Contradictory judgments neither offend not disturb me; rather they arouse and exercise me. When someone contradicts me, he arouses my attention not my anger. I search for my contradictor, he who educates me” (*Essais*, « De l’art de conférer »).