Values in Public Education: Dialogue Within Diversity

By Harold Heie

When should education be termed "public"? It has been argued that "public" education ought to be defined in terms of educational service to the public rather than in terms of sponsorship. I will concur. But, how does one maximize such service to the public? Based on Bernard Lonergan's views of cognition and their implications for education, my major thesis is that there ought to be room for diversity in primary value commitments between schools, but that public support is warranted at the high school or college level only if a school agrees to participation in public dialogue with other schools about issues affecting the public good. Such "public" schools should also provide opportunities for students to give expression to their individual beliefs in tasks that serve the common good.

Consensus Versus Diversity

Much of the current debate on the place of value commitments in public schools is stalemated between two major emphases, both of which contain valuable insights. The debate will progress only by transcending both emphases with an appropriate synthesis. One approach hopes that amidst the plurality of value commitments in our society, we can arrive at significant consensus about values to be fostered in public schools. The second approach questions the feasibility of that hope. Proponents argue that all education is informed by value commitments and different groups of people holding diverse sets of basic value commitments ought to be able to establish separate schools, all under the rubric of public education.

A recent book, *The Blackboard Fumble*, edited by Ken Sidney[1], contains brief essays by proponents of these differing approaches. On the side of the consensus

Continuing dissatisfaction with American education, combined with proposals for educational "choice," have led to intensification of the "public vs. private" debate as well as to controversy about the kinds of values publicly-supported education should exemplify and inculcate. In this essay Harold Heie proposes a model in which a diversity of publicly-supported schools, each proclaiming and promoting its own value and worldview commitments, will engage in a continuous "public dialogue about alternative viewpoints on issues affecting the public good." Mr. Heie is academic dean at Messiah College.

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[1] Ken Sidey, ed., *The Blackboard Fumble*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1989)

But there are limits to the degree of consensus that can be hoped for using this approach. Consensus can probably be reached on the importance of honesty and even on the importance of good character, but can it be reached on the particular decisions supposedly expressive of such good character? At some point, not easy to define, disparate value commitments may reflect such basic disagreements about the nature of the moral universe that consensus will be well nigh impossible. The contemporary heated debate about abortion will illustrate my point.

At the bumper sticker level, the abortion debate appears to be between those who are for physical life (pro-life) and those who are for freedom of choice (pro-choice). I find this black-and-white approach particularly unhelpful since I happen to be for both physical life and freedom of choice, properly understood. A more adequate approach to the debate is to seek to uncover the differing assumptions about the fundamental nature of the world that underlie the simple solutions that fit on bumper stickers.

Since this is not a paper on abortion, I will limit myself to some questions that need to be asked of both camps, resisting the temptation to give some of my answers. To pro-choicers, I would first ask whether the value of freedom of choice is the only human value? Are there other values such as physical life or caring relationship with spouse? And if there are multiple values, what is the relationship, if any, between these values? Are they of "equal" status? Is the moral universe such that these values can come into irreconcilable conflict? If so, how does one resolve such a conflict? Can one appeal to a hierarchy of values?

I have questions for pro-lifers also, some of them the same. Is physical life the only human value? If it is, can I then assume that you are also a pacifist? If not, then there must be a value or two that you believe takes precedence over physical life. What are such values? Could freedom be one of them? Is the moral universe such that values will never come into conflict? Will there always be a non-destructive alternative? If not, are there ever those rare cases where I must choose the lesser of two evils?

The point of my questions is to indicate that the abortion debate is not most fundamentally a debate about being for physical life or for freedom of choice. Beneath the surface, the differences reflect disparate worldview assumptions about the very nature of the moral universe. To think that we can reach consensus about such worldview assumptions, even within the Christian community, much less with non-Christians, is more naive than even I am prone to be (though I will eventually hold on to one last strand of naivete in my later proposal).

How does one then provide public education for groups of people who have irreconcilable differences at the level of value commitments and other fundamental assumptions about the nature of reality? The first, and far from insignificant, step is to honestly acknowledge these differences. Proponents of the diversity approach argue that the issue is not between value-free public education and value-laden private education. All education, under whatever auspices, is based

134   on fundamental value commitments.[9] The issue is how to deal fairly with groups having disparate value commitments.

The proposed strategy of those who champion diversity is to allow different schools to build their curricula on their own respective value and other world-view commitments.[10] The state is to "promote public justice,"[11] and "part of what justice requires is the recognition of a healthy pluralism in the public arena."[12] Such pluralism will be fostered by the existence of various schools based on discernibly different worldview commitments, with parents to be given the responsibility of choosing which schools their children are to attend. It is argued that " . . . public justice . . . includes a commitment to protecting parents' freedom to provide an education for their children that does not contradict home-taught values and perspectives on life."[13]

Of course, the above is not basically new if one views it as a call for the coexistence of private education with public education. But that is not what is being proposed. Rather, the radical suggestion is that all of these schools should fall under the rubric of public education. Rockne McCarthy calls into question the present definition of public education that includes "only *secular* schools that are government owned, managed and funded."[14] He argues that this "narrow view of public education results in an educational monopoly that does not represent the diversity of values and educational viewpoints in our contemporary society."[15] Rather than defining public education in terms of "sponsorship," McCarthy argues for a definition in terms of "educational service."[16] He poses the question: "Do the many perspectives inevitably lead to conflict and the undermining of the public good, or is diversity something to be accepted as a reality of American life and looked upon as the possible source of national richness and strength?"[17] Citing recent research, McCarthy answers his own question as follows

Educational research and experience is clearly demonstrating the significant public contribution that a wide variety of schools is making to American education and our democratic society. (It is clear that a government school is only one type of school that is providing a public service.) The real distinction with respect to the concept of *public*, therefore, should

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[9] Richard A. Baer, Jr., p. 51.

[10] For full elaborations of this approach, see Rockne W. McCarthy, et al., *Disestablishment A Second Time: Genuine Pluralism for American Schools*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982) and Rockne McCarthy, et al., *Society, State, and Schools*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1981). This approach is strongly advocated by the Association for Public Justice, Washington, D.C.

[11] Rockne W. McCarthy, *Society, State, and Schools*, p. 19.

[12] Rockne W. McCarthy, *Disestablishment a Second Time*, p. 129.

[13] Rockne W. McCarthy, "A New Definition of 'Public' Education," *The Blackboard Fumble*, p. 79.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., p. 86.

[17] Ibid.

be a distinction between public schools that are government sponsored, and public schools that are independently managed.[18]

McCarthy obviously goes beyond seeing diversity in schooling as a "possible source" of "national richness and strength." He documents the claim that a "significant public contribution" is being made by this diversity. But this raises the question as to whether new strategies are possible that will further enhance this present level of public contribution.

This diversity approach also includes insights that comport with Christian faith. God created human beings as valuing beings. Value-neutrality is a myth. We all have deep-rooted value commitments and other worldview assumptions that inform all our thinking and decision-making, however unacknowledged and unexamined they may be at times. Furthermore, the dignity God has granted to us as human beings requires that we be able to express our commitments in a manner that gives equal opportunity for expression to those who hold differing commitments. However complex a biblically informed view of justice may be, it will surely include this aspect of "public justice."

But there also are limitations to the diversity approach, as presently conceived. There is the risk of social fragmentation, or even a pernicious tribalism inimical to the public good. In his foreword to *Disestablishment a Second Time*, Martin Marty eloquently sounds this warning.

While the authors argue for alternatives to public schools, then, I would also argue that we have too readily begun to regard the schools not as *insufficiently* religious but as *too* religious. It is time to cool the temperature, to lower the voice. People can discuss Plato and Aristotle, Renaissance humanism, Kant's categorical imperative and Mill's utilitarianism, loyalty and patriotism and ideals and principles without always at all points "going up higher" into theology and to articulated religious systems. Until and unless we can restore some of that more neutral sense to public education we will find that the public forum as such will disappear completely. America will be left with self-enclosed, solipsistic, mutually exclusive tribes. We shall be condemned to interpret our texts in isolation, to move in our own hermeneutical circles, to keep our tribes out of touch with all others.

That approach has been tried and is being tried all over the world, from the New Guinea bush to Africa to Lebanon. The name for it is not pluralism or dialogue or civil disagreement but tribal warfare. Civil argument, political debate, confrontation of traditions, all these are going to have to occur somewhere, with or without alternative school systems. When such argument is not given a forum, the consequences are too serious to consider with equanimity. They can best be avoided if we are less insistent that all alternatives to our own religion are themselves aggressive and belligerent religions, subversive of our own.[19]

It appears that Marty places some hope in the consensus approach. At a minimum he calls for civility as an expression of our humanness. Even if we can't agree with each other, we at least need to create forums to talk to each other about our differences. Otherwise, we are in danger of isolation, at best, or tribal warfare, at worst. Another respected commentator on the contemporary scene, Richard John Neuhaus, makes a similar plea for "Dialogue."

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[18] Ibid., p. 87.

[19] Martin E. Marty, Forward to *Disestablishment a Second Time*, pp. XIV, IV.

"Dialogue" is one of American religion's shopworn terms. Although there is much talk about dialogue, very little of it actually takes place. Religious discourse—especially about politics and public affairs—is increasingly polarized; there is much contestation, but little conversation. If truths are to be tested, however, there is no substitute for dialogue.[20]

Many of the tragedies of our time do not stem primarily from the fact that we disagree with each other about fundamental worldview assumptions. Rather, the tragedy is that we can no longer talk about our fundamental differences. So we fight about them, first with words and then with guns.

Lonergan on Cognition and Implications for Education

Granting the valuable insights of both the consensus and diversity approaches, there is need for a synthesis that will maximize their potential and minimize their limitations. My starting point toward such synthesis is the broad concept of cognition proposed by the late Jesuit scholar Fr. Bernard Lonergan, and summarized in the four precepts "be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible."[21] Lonergan summarizes these four levels of consciousness as follows

There is the *empirical* level on which we sense, perceive, imagine, feel, speak, move. There is an *intellectual* level on which we inquire, come to understand, express what we have understood, work out the presuppositions and implications of our expression. There is the *rational* level on which we reflect, marshal the evidence, pass judgment on the truth or falsity, certainty or probability, of a statement. There is the *responsible* level on which we are concerned with ourselves, our own operations, our goals, and so deliberate about possible courses of action, evaluate them, decide, and carry out our decisions.[22]

Whereas much of contemporary education stops with Lonergan's intellectual level, an adequate view of education must also encompass the rational and responsible levels to be true to the full range of human experience. My own paraphrasing of Lonergan's position goes something like this: (1) A student needs to be attentive to her experiences, including her deepest feelings; (2) Since experiences are not self-interpreting, a student must develop her own system of beliefs that makes sense of her world of experience; (3) Since there are competing claims for explaining human experience, a student must learn to "reason critically," to discriminate between adequate and inadequate claims to knowledge; (4) In the process of developing her own system of beliefs, a student must express her present level of understanding in her daily decisions and actions.

If one views these four levels as characteristics of "good education," then much of what passes for high school and college education, in both the "public" and "private" realms, is called into question. For starters, good education will not view students as passive learners. All too often, the teacher is viewed as the person with the answers, who passes these answers down to passive students, who then dutifully return them on examinations. This "student-as-sponge" model is

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[20] Text taken from the back cover of each volume of The Encounter Series, Richard John Neuhaus, General Editor (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans).

[21] Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1972), p. 53.

[22] Bernard Lonergan, p. 9

not conducive to helping a student develop her own system of beliefs. Granting that the dissemination of a reasonable amount of factual information is necessary for good education, it is hardly sufficient. Good education engages students as active learners in ways appropriate to the given grade level. Students must eventually develop the reasoning skills needed to interact with claims to knowledge, even those made by revered teachers. Only then will the student develop her own system of beliefs about her world of experience, rather than one handed down from a teacher, minister or parents. It is only such personally appropriated beliefs that will have power to inform daily decision-making and living.

If we really want students to develop their own beliefs, then we must be willing to expose them to alternative claims to knowledge, made by real live proponents of such competing claims. To have a proponent of one viewpoint present a competing viewpoint too easily leads to caricature. A good school will go even further than exposing students to personal representatives of alternative viewpoints. It will also take the next essential step, which is to orchestrate dialogue between those holding competing viewpoints. It will create forums for those who disagree with each other to talk about such disagreements. This suggestion is based on my conviction that exposure to, or, better yet, participation in such dialogue is the optimum means for students and teachers (older students) to sort out alternative claims to knowledge and refine their own belief systems.

If you profess commitment to the Christian faith, as I do, you may find the above suggestion objectionable if you think there is only one "Christian system of beliefs" and you view such a system as static, handed down intact many centuries ago. Although there are "essential beliefs," without which the faith can no longer be called Christian,[23] our belief systems as Christians need to be dynamic, open to continual refinement.[24] Proponents of a static view will rightly see great risk in exposing Christian students to persuasive proponents of non-Christian points

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[23] Of course, the question of which beliefs are "essential" to the Christian faith is an open one, and subject to much contemporary debate. James Davison Hunter, in his influential *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), correctly states, in my estimation, that an issue that evangelical Christians must deal with is that "of boundaries [of Orthodoxy]; the theological criteria determining the range and the limits of acceptability" (p. 19). However, Hunter then defines those boundaries, at least implicitly, in terms of an apparently static set of beliefs referred to as "the theological . . . traditions of the Evangelical heritage" (p. 175). Contrary to Hunter, I argue for a more dynamic definition of theological boundaries that recognizes the diversity in Christian theological thought and allows for refinements in traditional theological understanding. See Harold Heie, "Wanted: Christian Colleges for a Dynamic Evangelicalism," *Christian Scholar's Review*, XXI:3, March 1992, pp. 254–274. For further insights on this important debate, see Douglas Jacobsen, "Revisioning Evangelical Theology," *The Reformed Journal*, October 1985, pp. 18–22, and "The Rise of Evangelical Hermeneutical Pluralism," *Christian Scholar's Review*, XVI:4, July 1987, pp. 325–335; William J. Abraham, *The Coming Great Revival: Recovering the Full Evangelical Tradition* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984); and David L. Wolfe, *Epistemology: The Justification of Belief* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1982).

[24] "For now we see in a mirror dimly . . . now I know in part . . ."(I Corinthians 13:12)

of view. Proponents of a dynamic view will take that risk, believing that if God is indeed the ultimate source of all that is true, then we should leave no stone unturned in searching for a better partial grasp of that truth, including dialogue with those who hold to different beliefs. And such dialogue may even be a means of God's grace, whereby we learn from non-Christians and non-Christians can be led to see the sense that one of the Christian systems of belief makes of the world of human experience.

Not only will good education have the dialogical characteristic that I extrapolate primarily from Lonergan's rational level, but it will intentionally address his responsible level, which also suffers from general neglect in our schools, both "public" and "private." In brief, all too often schooling is viewed as a "detour from life" rather than being integral to daily living. At the collegiate level, where my experience lies, the only strong connection typically made between learning and living is in terms of the learning needed to obtain a job, despite our college catalog rhetoric. Try to think of the last time you heard a student say he wanted to learn about the true, the good and the beautiful because he wanted to live well—all lifelong, in and out of the job (I actually have a nephew who feels that way, but he's lonesome). Good education must create connections between learning and living out that learning, now, not later, in ways that address the concrete needs of people in our society, ways that foster the "common good." And Christians quick to define people's needs only in "spiritual" terms need to be reminded of the centrality in the life and teachings of Jesus of addressing the total spectrum of human needs.[25]

A Proposed Strategy for Dialogue and Action

I concur with McCarthy's judgment that education ought to be termed "public" when it contributes significantly to the public good. To define public education in terms of present sponsorship is to forget the prior question as to which forms of schooling are worthy of sponsorship by the public. Our present answer to that prior question must emphasize the anticipated contribution to the public good.

I also grant McCarthy's claim that diversity in schooling ought to be looked upon as a "possible source of national richness and strength."[26] But possibilities are not always actualized. Based on the thinking of Lonergan, I will take McCarthy's position one giant step further by proposing a way to maximize the realization of this possibility for enhancing the public good. In brief, diverse but totally separated schools can enhance the public good by the contributions of their graduates to the public realm. But all too often, separatism from those with differing value commitments during schooling leads to continued separatism after formal schooling, which only minimally fosters the public good. My proposal will be to orchestrate dialogue between schools holding diverse value

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[25] See Matthew 25:31–46.

[26] Rockne W. McCarthy, "A New Definition of 'Public' Education," p. 86.

commitments, thereby preparing students for such continuing dialogue in the public square after graduation. That is not only good education, but it is also vital for the public good. But let me start at the beginning.

Education is worthy of public support if it contributes to the development of informed citizens bringing a diversity of viewpoints to the public square who are committed to acting responsibly on the basis of their beliefs, and if it satisfies criteria for "good education." Given this overarching view, the implications for a given "public school" at the high school or college level[27] are as follows.

Each school has the right and responsibility to explicitly state its fundamental value commitments and other elements of the worldview that will inform its education. These assumptions are inevitably behind the scenes, though seldom fully articulated, in all existing schools, whether publically or privately sponsored.[28] Each school also has the right to limit its teachers and staff to those in agreement with these foundational assumptions.

Each school seeking public support must demonstrate satisfaction of publically approved criteria formulated from the educational precepts "Be Attentive! Be Intelligent! Be Reasonable! Be Responsible!" Such criteria will include the stipulation that whatever the fundamental worldview commitments of the school, a student will be exposed to proponents of alternative viewpoints and to the process of evaluating all viewpoints in order to arrive at her own system of beliefs, and will be provided with orchestrated means to express her present beliefs in daily decisions and actions. In addition, the school shall meet publically approved minimal standards for teacher certification and curricular expectations relative to subject matter and basic skills.

Finally, the school shall commit itself to collaboration with all other publically supported schools in the immediate geographical area in a process of public dialogue about alternative viewpoints on issues affecting the public good, and the development of opportunities for students to give expression to their individual

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[27] It is obvious that the appropriate timing for exposure to alternative viewpoints, critical evaluation of these viewpoints and responsible action based on one's own beliefs will depend on the level of development of the student. Based on the recent work of developmental theorists, I would argue that my proposal is applicable at least at the high school and college levels. I leave to others the more complex issue of the possible adaptability of my proposal to the grade school level in the light of developmental theory. Decisions regarding these difficult "timing" issues must result from public debate.

[28] This is not to suggest that a given "public school" (as currently defined in terms of sponsorship) will necessarily have a unified set of value commitments and worldview assumptions. As noted by Kenneth A. Strike in *Educational Policy and the Just Society* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1982), "The chaos of viewpoints which actually characterizes public-school personnel is easily reified into a unified secular ideology. As easy as this step is, however, it is a mistake. This variant of the claims that schools have established a secular religion is unsubstantiated" (p. 107). However, even such a commitment to a plurality of viewpoints is a philosophical commitment that needs to be made explicit. I would further suggest that schools having a primary commitment to the Christian faith should also allow for significant plurality of viewpoints in the context of that primary commitment (see footnote 23).

beliefs in tasks that serve the common good. A brief example of each form of collaboration will help to clarify my proposal.

It is not uncommon for high schools and colleges to have debating societies. Such societies from neighboring schools ought to be debating major contemporary issues, not as an extra-curricular activity at the periphery of the educational process but as an indispensable requirement for good education. Faculty at these various schools should also be involved in such public debates.

Opportunities for serving the common good can also be a collaborative effort, in ways that integrally relate learning with active forms of service. For example, the plight of the homeless is a concern that should be common to persons holding divergent worldview assumptions, due to our common humanity, though our proposed solutions may differ based on our assumptions. This suggests that scenario of public debate on the issue, talking about all the proposed solutions, to be followed by a collaborative public service project sufficiently multi-faceted to provide concrete opportunities for students and teachers to work toward solutions consistent with their various foundational assumptions.

Now, if the above sketches some of the characteristics of good education worthy of public support, the important question of access to such education remains. Public justice requires that each person have equal opportunity for publically supported education in ways that are not destructive of the opportunity for others.[29] At a minimum, this implies that the financing of publically supported education should be progressive, providing financial benefits for the poor that are proportionately greater than benefits for the affluent. It is imperative to avoid a two-tiered system of quality public schools for the affluent and second rate public schools for the poor.

Each student should be free to apply for admission to any publically supported school, and each such school should admit any student choosing to attend provided the school has the resources to meet the student's need and the student agrees to abide by the standards and expectations of the school. No publically supported school shall discriminate in student admissions on the basis of race, color, sex, national or ethnic origin, or religious creed. Yes, whereas I have argued that any school may select faculty and staff on the basis of compatibility with the school's explicit value commitments and other worldview beliefs, any school supported by the public for the good of the public must be

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[29] In his *Educational Policy and the Just Society*, Kenneth A. Strike provides a penetrating analysis of the concept of equal opportunity in education. He argues that "equal opportunity should be interpreted as implying a constraint on the variance of social rewards permitted" (p. 225). The essence of his argument is that "Rewards and opportunities. . . turn out to be nearly identical" (p. 224) in the sense that great disparities in the richness of the student's home environment due to disparities in social rewards can be so significant that they cannot be compensated for by formal schooling. When that happens, it cannot be said that the schools provide "equal opportunity" (which Strike takes to be one of the three "primary public functions which should be performed by schools," along with "citizenship" and "economic competence" p. 249).

open to all students who wish to study within the context of those commitments and beliefs.

Of course, some present "private" schools will not want to "go public" if the above conditions are imposed. They should have the right to exist and remain "private," with no public support, provided they meet minimal requirements for student achievement. This also allows room for the home schooling movement. But, my argument is that such forms of "private" schooling should not receive public support since they are not committed to the public dialogue that is absolutely necessary if we are to significantly reclaim the goal of fostering the public good.

Sone Objections

I need to anticipate at least three major questions about my proposal.[30] First, I am defining "good education" in terms of Lonergan's precepts "Be Attentive! Be Intelligent! Be Reasonable! Be Responsible!" This is yet another list of common human virtues, and any such list is surely debatable, as is the claim that this constitutes "good education." My first and obvious response is that the public dialogue I call for should begin with these debates, orchestrated to involve all present elements of the educational sector, public and private as presently defined.

But I must anticipate at least one point where a debate on Lonergan's precepts may lead nowhere. You will recall Lonergan's proposal that at the "Be Reasonable" or "Rational" level "we reflect, marshal the evidence, pass judgment on the truth or falsity, certainty or probability, of a statement" (footnote 22). A first criticism may be that this overemphasizes the role of "rationality" in human functioning. For readers having that concern I need to make clear that I am not proposing a "rationalism" that compromises the importance of the affective or intuitive aspects of human experience. Rather, I am suggesting a form of "critical rationalism" defined in terms of the search for criteria for criticizing claims to knowledge, whatever the source of such claims, including the affective or intuitive. However difficult it is to establish such "criteria for criticism," it appears to me to be necessary, unless one wishes to take the position that any claim to knowledge is self-authenticating or as good as any other claim. I take this latter position to be absurd, obviated by numerous counter-examples, but it is nevertheless a pervasive contemporary view. To the extent that this view dominates, the public discourse I call for could deteriorate into a "tower of Babel." Kenneth Strike sounds this warning in his commentary on John Stuart Mill's argument for the "Marketplace of Ideas"

Mill's argument for the marketplace of ideas is to subject opinion to the light of reason by permitting criticism and the posing of alternatives. This assumes that we are rarely certain of our ideas, but it also assumes that one opinion is not as good as another. Ideas can be improved by being examined. If this is the case, then there must be standards and criteria for the evaluation of ideas.

[30] I wish to thank Rhonda and Doug Jacobsen for their very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper, including the posing of these questions.

If there are standards and criteria for the evaluation of ideas, a marketplace of ideas is going to be productive only if the participants understand these standards and criteria. Ideas cannot be subjected to rational evaluation when the participants do not know what counts as a reason. It is the ability of the participants to weigh ideas according to rational standards which makes the difference between a marketplace of ideas and a tower of Babel.[31]

Strike rightfully concludes that this "marketplace of ideas" is feasible only if the participants have adequate expertise, and if there is a "reasonable equality of expertise" between participants in public discourse. My more immediate concern, however, is whether the participants in public discourse can reach consensus as to appropriate criteria for evaluating competing viewpoints. The prognosis is not cheerful. But my proposal will surely produce another Tower of Babel if we cannot reach such consensus. The only starting point is for us to start talking to each other about criteria for evaluating claims to knowledge.

A second major question about my proposal concerns its ontological warrant; the adequacy of my assumptions about the nature of humanness. My adoption of Lonergan's precepts is packed with such assumptions. In particular, my core assumption is that for us to talk to each other and thereby to learn from each other is an expression of our common humanity, whatever our religious commitments. I leave to professional philosophers and theologians the debate as to the adequacy of my assumptions.[32]

A third major question takes me full circle. Having pointed to the limitations of the consensus approach, I nevertheless stubbornly pursue the quest for consensus through public dialogue. How much do I hope to accomplish? I couch my response in terms of a homemade adage that keeps me going in a world where my dreams for change typically far exceed the change that occurs: "Hope for 10, expect 5, get 2; and 2 is better than nothing; if you don't believe that, don't start."

My wildest dream is that the dialogical model I propose will exemplify debating toward truth. My hope is that despite worldview differences that appear irreconcilable, even about the very meaning of truth, we can talk to each other about these differences; examine our differing viewpoints against our common human experience; and actually reach consensus about some major elements of a true understanding of the human condition (that's a 10!).

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[31] Kenneth A. Strike, p. 138.

[32] Such debate should include consideration of provocative insights provided by William Johnson Everett in his recent book *God's Federal Republic: Reconstructing our Governing Symbol* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1988). In contrast to earlier views of personality that considered the self as "*Homo Sapiens* (rational self), *Homo Faber* (self as maker), *Homo Laborans* (laboring self), and *Homo Symbolicus* (self as symbol maker)," Everett suggests a new "governing symbol. . .the self as *Homo Publicans*—the self as seeking publication in the midst of others in a public world" (p. 145). That symbol of our humanness informs my proposal, as a complement to earlier symbols. My own commitment to the centrality of dialogue with others as an expression of our common humanity has been primarily influenced by the writings of Martin Buber, especially *Between Man and Man* (New York: MacMillan, 1965).

But where consensus is not possible, I expect at least even-handed adjudication between conflicting claims (that's a 5!). Alasdair Macintyre notes this expectation in the judicial and political realms in his *After Virtue*.[33] Macintyre suggests that "our society cannot hope to achieve moral consensus,"[34] and that "Marx was fundamentally right in seeing conflict and not consensus at the heart of modern social structure."[35] If this is the case, then Macintyre draws important conclusions for constitutional theory, calling into question the view that the function of the Supreme Court is to invoke a set of consistent agreed upon principles for evaluating particular laws. Rather, Macintyre proposes the following, citing the recent Bakke Affirmative Action case as an example.

> ...if my argument is correct, one function of the Supreme Court must be to keep the peace between rival social groups adhering to rival and incompatible principles of justice by displaying a fairness which consists in even-handedness in its adjudications. So the Supreme Court in Bakke forbade precise ethnic quotas for admission to colleges and universities, but allowed discrimination in favor of previously deprived minority groups. Try to conjure up a set of consistent principles behind such a decision, and ingenuity may or may not allow you to find the court not guilty of formal inconsistency. But even to make such an attempt is to miss the point. The Supreme Court in Bakke, as on occasion in other cases, played the role of a peacemaking or truce-keeping body by negotiating its way through an impasse of conflict, not by invoking our shared moral first principles. For our society as a whole has none.
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> What this brings out is that modern politics cannot be a matter of genuine moral consensus. And it is not. Modern politics is civil war carried on by other means, and Bakke was an engagement whose antecedents were at Gettysburg and Shiloh.[36]

But, at times, the even-handed adjudication of competing claims may not be immediately realizable. In such cases I would encourage us to keep talking, for that dialogue is itself an expression of our common humanity (that's a 2, and such civility is better than fighting).

I close on a personal note. I wasn't born yesterday, believe it or not. I understand the logistical nightmares associated with my proposal. I also have war stories to tell about too many of my own unsuccessful attempts to get people to talk to each other about their differences, even in institutions whose members profess commitment to the same basic values and worldview beliefs. And now I have the audacity to suggest that we need to create public education structures that will orchestrate public dialogue between persons and schools holding widely divergent worldviews. And I dare to believe that such dialogue can make a difference, in ways that will foster the public good. That is clearly utopian. But it is also right. Anything less is destructive of our common humanity and, for myself, anything less is antithetical to my understanding of my Christian faith. Jesus calls me to love other people, including those who disagree with me. The starting point for loving another person is to talk and to listen.

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[33] Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

[34] Ibid., p. 2S2.

[35] Ibid., p. 253.

[36] Ibid.