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## **The University and the Development of Ideals and Moral Values**

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# The University and the Development of Ideals and Moral Values

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LEO A. CULLUM

## I

**T**HE term "ideal" as we know is connected with "idea" and both terms are reminiscent of much philosophical travail and controversy. However, for our purpose, it is sufficient to say that an ideal is an exemplary idea or plan to which individuals of a group must conform if they are to be excellent or perfect. An ideal is a pattern of perfection or excellence. Thus we speak of an ideal husband or an ideal marriage. We mean that we have—that people in general have—a mental exemplary picture of what a husband or a marriage should be. The ideal husband is the perfect husband, and he is perfect because he is everything that he should be. This picture is formed from a consideration of the nature of the thing, from our own experience, and the experience of others, and we measure a man or a marriage beside this pattern of excellence, and we call the individual case ideal if it conforms exactly to the pattern.

When we speak of "ideals" in human conduct we are really speaking of formulae or propositions which synthesize excellence in human activity. For example, we speak of patriotic ideals. They are the complexus of rules that a patriot would follow, or the complexus of propositions describing his conduct. From a consideration of the patriot's role, from experience and

from the reflections of others thereon we have formed a picture of a patriot, and all candidates for the name must meet this test.

There are ideals in every field of human endeavor: ideals in scholarship, ideals in art, ideals in athletic skill. Always there is question of a standard of excellence to be met. However, in our present discussion we are considering ideals not in any limited area of activity but in manhood itself—not how to be an excellent scholar or painter or athlete, but how to be an excellent man and it is in the latter aspect that ideals are linked with moral values.

## II

With regard to moral values, it is well to remember that morality only concerns free acts. We cannot speak of the morality of a lifeless thing, or of an animal, or our own necessary acts such as breathing or digestion. We do not attribute guilt to a typhoon for blowing down a house or to a cat for stealing the fish or to our own blood pressure for being too high. We only praise or blame things that a man does freely, and we praise them or blame them as they conform to the law of his teleology, as they are fitting to his individual, social and religious nature.

Thus for example all recognize that gluttony is immoral because it is contrary to man's own nature which intends eating as an instrument of health, not of illness. All recognize that it is immoral for children to rebel against their parents because this rebellion is contrary to the social nature of man which dictates the existence of the family and the authority of the parents therein.

Now it will be noticed that ideals and moral values agree in this, that they are both concerned with the conformity of an individual act or series of acts with standards by which they are to be judged. But there are two differences.

The first is that the ideal is a standard of excellence or perfection whereas morality deals with righteousness (or rightness) and considers only the lawfulness or the obligation of the thing to be measured. Now, since there are degrees of right-

ness, it follows that a thing can be right without being excellent and can be moral without being ideal. On the other hand nothing can be excellent without being right and therefore whatever is ideal in the realm of human conduct as such is also moral. Thus for example it would be an ideal of charity and humanity never to refuse alms to a beggar, but to accept a lower standard of philanthropy would not be immoral.

We see therefore that there is a slight difference between ideals and moral values in their emphasis, but in this present discussion we can take them as meaning the same thing, namely standards or patterns of human conduct which must be met if men are to respond to the noble call latent in their human nature.

### III

We have been analyzing the two concepts: ideals and moral values. There are certain things evident from these considerations. The first is the existence of human freedom. By this we mean that man is at times able to choose an act or reject it, choose one course of conduct or another. We are not saying that man *may* choose either, but that he *can* choose either. A servant who finds fifty pesos on his master's table *can* take it or leave it. But he *may* not take it; he must—i.e., ought to—leave it alone for it is not his.

Therefore a philosophy which rules out human freedom also makes our whole discussion unintelligible. Any form of determinism—namely any theory which holds that man is not free and that all his acts (including even those apparently free) are adequately and inevitably determined by their antecedents—is incompatible with the operation of ideals and moral values. Since these antecedents are themselves an inflexible framework beyond human influence, it would be a hopeless and senseless task to plan the future conduct of anybody. Development would be a rigid evolution of which we are the impotent witnesses and on which we are carried like chips on a stream.

However, if it is important in the development of ideals and moral values to insist that man is free, it is no less important to remember that he is not wholly free. Long ago the

pagan poet Ovid said, "*Video meliora proboque: deteriora sequor*" (I see and approve what is better, but I follow what is worse). In other words, the human will does not stand like the needle of a nicely adjusted analytic balance, ready to move easily in either direction. On the contrary it has a heavy bias towards one side and that bias is not towards ideals and moral values. This is a condition which is known in Christian thought as original sin. The recognition of it and provision against it is of the utmost importance in solving problems of idealism and morality.

Cardinal Newman, speaking of this condition, has said in the *Apologia*:

I look out of myself into the world of men, and there I see a sight which fills me with unspeakable distress... that condition of the whole race so fearfully yet exactly described in the Apostle's words "having no hope and without God in the world," all this is a vision to dizzy and appal; and inflicts upon the mind the sense of a profound mystery, which is absolutely beyond human solution.... The human race is implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity. It is out of joint with the purposes of its Creator. This is a fact, a fact as true as the fact of its existence; and thus the doctrine of what is theologically called original sin becomes to me almost as certain as that the world exists, and as the existence of God.<sup>1</sup>

To plan for the morality of our youth without informing them of this condition of their nature is as unreal and disastrous as to teach navigation from charts that studiously omit all marking of shoals and hidden rocks.

#### IV

The second thing that our consideration of the nature of ideals and moral values teaches us is that the free acts of man are under *law*. This is the pattern to which they must conform. In the framing of this paper's title the word development is used: "The University and the *Development* of Ideals and Moral Values." It would be a great mistake to think that we create these values and standards or that they are something of man's devising. No, we are dealing here with the discovery and understanding, the assimilation and appropriation of stand-

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 5 (Maisie Ward ed., New York 1946, p. 161).

ards that already exist and have always existed everywhere. The "development" is therefore the progressive recognition by the university world, by its students and others who fall under its influence, of the standards to which man must conform his free conduct if he is to realize the potentialities of his being.

And this, I take it, is the exact meaning of the subject under discussion. Ideals and moral values may be taken in a subjective or an objective sense. Objectively they are the standards to which men must conform. But in the truest sense of the terms, they are not ideals or moral values until grasped and loved by men. One author speaking of ideals in this fullest sense says, "An ideal is an idea transformed by love into a motive of conduct." So with moral values. They must be recognized and esteemed to become values. Knowledge however must precede love and the first step in the development of ideals and moral values must be their discovery and recognition.

## V

If the first step in the development of ideas and moral values is to know them, it follows that any philosophy which says that they are unknowable renders the task futile. Therefore all the various shades of scepticism which deny man's capacity to arrive at certain knowledge of the moral order are an attack upon idealism and morality and should be treated as such. They, no less than determinism, are incompatible with a rational approach to the problem of developing ideals and moral values.

The initial step then is and must be to know them. But the question naturally arises: where do we find them?

We find them first of all in human nature. Taking for granted here that God created man and that He had a purpose in doing so, the pattern of excellence (i.e. God's goal with regard to man) is revealed in His artifact itself. If I am a house owner and have a carefully kept lawn with flower beds artistically arranged, it is not necessary for me to put up a sign, "Do not park your car on the lawn or drive through the flower beds." The standard of conduct—my will—is inherent in the disposition I have made of my property. So in human

nature, by studying what God has done with it, we are able to discover what His standards are with regard to it. These standards are the ideals and moral values to which I must conform my free acts.

But if we were left to our own searching we should only with difficulty discover these standards. The savage in the depth of the jungle agrees with us on certain ideals and moral values which he has discovered with us, but he is ignorant of many very important moral truths we know. Fortunately we are not savages: we are part of a long tradition of superior minds in all parts of the world and of all times which have contemplated this problem of human moral excellence and have been able to systematize its elements into a corpus of moral standards easily available to anyone.

But even this would not have been enough. We referred above to that disorganization of human nature which Newman called an aboriginal calamity. One effect of this calamity was also to prevent man from reasoning easily and accurately, because his judgment is swayed towards that which is pleasing away from that which is true. In other words, the fact is that man easily closes his eyes to ideals and moral values when their recognition would mean that he must forsake what is gratifying to his senses and flattering to his ego.

It is here that another priceless source of knowledge is at man's command: divine revelation. We have in the Old and New Testament, especially in the latter, two great fountains of ideals and moral guidance. Here the less sharply defined discoveries of our reason are corrected, clarified and applied and new things which we should never have discovered with our unaided reason are shown us. The Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, the Sermon on the Lake Shore, the letters of St. Paul—these give us in the clearest and fullest possible way the standards which are to be followed.

## VI

From all these sources therefore we have a code of ideals and moral values.

Note some of the things we observe about them. First, they are for all men. There is not a different set of standards for east and west, for yesterday and today. They are universal, permanent, unchanging.

They are moreover a law, not simply a code of etiquette; they are binding or at least operative in the realm of conscience because emanating from an authority.

Finally these standards are supreme. There are many other values in human affairs which contend with them. Material success is always a powerful magnet dragging men in its path. Fame and reputation awaken in many human hearts a fever that burns with relentless fury. Pleasure is the ignoble but seductive objective to which many, perhaps most, men pay court. Physical integrity, the preservation of life and limb, is instinct in human nature. But all of these must yield to moral ideals and values. To be a *man*—i.e. to incorporate in one's life the excellence proper to man, to fulfill the potentialities of human nature — one must be ready to sacrifice wealth and health, fame and reputation, even life itself, rather than depart from the standards of moral excellence possible and incumbent upon him.

I have said that they are not a code of etiquette. This point is not without its importance because many confuse good conduct with morality—meaning by good conduct, polite conduct. Though the two will often be in fact identified, the basis for classification is quite different. Good manners are conduct that is socially acceptable and approved. Morality is conduct that is excellent and right by other standards than society's ratification. It is right by standards that ultimately emanate from God.

Another misunderstanding is to equate morality and civic virtue. There can be no doubt that good citizenship should be based on ideals and morality and be an expression of them. But moral values are something different from and more fundamental than civic virtue. A man on a desert island would have no place for civic virtue. But he would still be bound by the laws of morality. For example it would still be wrong for him to get drunk—if indeed there were any liquor on the island.

## VII

Up to this point I have discussed the nature of ideals and moral values, what they imply and where in the concrete they are to be found. In this discussion, the universities' role was implied. Let us look at this role more explicitly.

How can the university develop ideals and moral values? Perhaps some will answer by saying simply that it cannot; the university is concerned with the communication of intellectual values. It is the university's function to conserve truth, interpret it, increase it and inspire its students with a spirit to carry these operations beyond the university walls. The university as such is not concerned with moral values.

In answer to this we wish to point out first of all that moral values are in themselves a field of knowledge belonging properly to philosophy and as such have their place rightfully within the university's objective.

But over and above this it must be remembered that we are dealing with a concrete situation and seeking an answer in that situation. The university is a segment of society. Besides its proper activities—lecturing, research—it has many others which are and cannot help but be the vehicle of moral values. Students in the university are acquiring ideals and moral values of some sort. All the persons and things of the university world play upon them to form them morally. The university in the concrete cannot be indifferent to this evolution which is taking place under its influence.

If it is stated that moral values should be provided for elsewhere, the simple fact is that they are not, and it is the duty of the university not to stand upon any academic definition of its function but to seize the opportunity and answer the challenge presented to it.

Hence the university, though in itself it may have no concern with moral values except to identify them and understand them, in the concrete has a much wider vocation.

The role of the university may be looked on either with respect to the world outside it or with respect to its internal

life. To develop ideals and moral values for the world outside, the university will place the weight of its authority and learning behind the spread of these standards of conduct, explaining them in lectures and articles, striving to bring them to the attention of the learned world and the intelligent public. It will study and support the underlying philosophy and combat hostile systems that tend to disrupt ideals and moral values. A noteworthy example of what can be done is the Notre Dame Institute of Natural Law which each year produces a series of studies on this subject. In general, the university will strive to do to the world outside its walls what it does to the smaller world within. It is really one problem, for the finest contribution the university can make is a stream of graduates filled with big ideals and love of virtue, apostles of goodness in all walks of life. Hence, what the university should do within its walls is also *mutatis mutandis* its external mission.

### VIII

Ultimately, virtue cannot be taught in lectures. It is a personal thing which each one must acquire for himself. The university is a segment of life and the student must begin to live—or continue to live—according to ideals and moral values. At every turn motives must be held up to the student why he should live virtuously—motives derived from duty, the nobility of virtue, love of fellowman, patriotism.

In the manifold activities of the school strict standards of integrity must be maintained. Student politics should be a school for honest civic service not a microcosm of that political corruption which the university hopes to correct. The university should strive to inculcate honesty in examinations, truthfulness and uprightness in all social relations, charity and justice to all, fairness and sportsmanship, obedience and respect for parents and other authorities, fidelity to duty, self-control and self-denial, purity of life, high standards of journalism in school publications without any trace of the character assassination, the scurrility and sensationalism which are a commonplace in contemporary newspapers.

In this mission the university will be sensitive to the character of its teaching staff. They are perhaps the strongest

force in the school for the development of ideals and moral values. Two educators, speaking of religion (but what they say is equally true of our subject) say:

Of decisive importance is the attitude and equipment of the teachers. To a large extent they form the traditions of the school and create its atmosphere. If they are religious men and women, the boys and girls who come under their influence will partake of their character. But if they pass lightly over, or ignore, or, as is sometimes the case, mock at the deeper meanings of life, or if they are embarrassed when faced with a religious problem, no amount of theoretical religious instruction can set at naught the perpetual operation of the silent forces of example.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, in dealing with its faculty, the university must exclude like a pest those false philosophies which deny freedom of the will or the effects of our "aboriginal calamity" or the existence and knowability of ideals and moral values which transcend all other values whether of art or science or anything else, which are objective, universal, unchanging and obligatory, with their root in the will of God. The denial of these things is the denial of human dignity itself.

Some will raise their eyebrows at this statement and wonder how it can be reconciled with "academic freedom," the alleged right of professors to teach anything they want. Academic freedom, like all freedoms, needs interpretation and control. We have seen in recent times that the United States Government and our own have refused to allow academic freedom to be an excuse for teaching philosophies subversive of the state. University authorities have a right to forbid the teaching of philosophies subversive not only of the state but of humanity.

## IX

Almost of equal importance with teacher influence is the presentation of attractive models of human excellence for imitation. Recently, the campaign for the proper celebration of the centenary of the birth of José Rizal was launched. One important reason behind this emphasis is the conviction of the

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<sup>2</sup> J. C. Chapman and G. S. Counts *Principles of Education* (Boston 1924) p. 362. Quoted by W. F. Cunningham *The Pivotal Problems of Education* (New York 1940) p. 226.

national leaders that Rizal is an embodiment of ideals and moral values, that in him the youth of the land will see enacted what each Filipino should strive to be.

Every country has its heroes, models not only of patriotic virtue but of other virtues too. But all these national figures can offer only partial ideals and only some moral values. And there is always the danger of admirers imitating the bad with the good. Thus for example certain millionaires are often held up as models to American youth. Indeed their enterprise and industry, their thrift and perseverance are worthy of imitation and can stimulate the youth to great ventures, but there is danger that the same youth may also accept these millionaires' shallow views on religion, their narrow outlook on charity and social justice. There is only one model who can be safely followed in everything, and that model is Christ. He is the embodiment of all ideals and moral values. Every record of history testifies that "He was the one and only person who possessed all the virtues in perfect harmony: humility without abjection; gravity without severity; chastity without hatred for women; indignation without anger; mercy without weakness; courage without recklessness."<sup>3</sup>

## X

We have endeavored in the preceding pages to indicate the role of the university in developing ideals and moral values. Its first task is to discover them and understand them and make them known in the university and out. For the world outside the university walls this will be achieved immediately by dissemination through lecturing and writing and by whatever other influences the university can exert on learned publications, institutions and societies.

The principal influence of the university, however, even upon the world outside its walls, will be through its students. In their case a further and more profound influence can be exerted over and above formal teaching by the creation of the proper

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<sup>3</sup> W. Doyle S.J. *Defense of the Catholic Church* (New York 1927) p. 93.

climate, by the influence of the teachers and especially by proposal of noble models and the noblest of all, Christ.

It will be observed how from whatever angle we approach our subject we always meet religion. The authority and obligation of these standards of conduct we have discussed cannot be maintained except on the hypothesis of a divine law-giver. The standards themselves cannot be properly recognized and understood except in the light of revelation. And finally the only sufficient model who will supply inspiration and motives together with actual internal assistance, namely, light for the mind and strength for the will, is Christ the Son of God. It is idle to hope to develop ideals and moral values except on a foundation of religion.

Newman has expressed this hopelessness in a memorable passage in *The Idea of a University*:

Quarry the granite rock with razors, or moor the vessel with a thread of silk; then may you hope with such keen and delicate instruments as human knowledge and human reason to contend against those giants, the passion and pride of man.<sup>4</sup>

In a recent address to the convention of heads and officials of private schools at Baguio, the late lamented Secretary of Education, Gregorio Hernandez Jr., called attention to the advantageous position of private schools in this regard. They can, he said, respond freely to the desires of Filipino parents that their children at all stages of their education be taught religion.

When Secretary Hernandez said this he was speaking not as a minister of religion (which he was not) but as a public official conversant with and distressed by the rampant immorality and corruption, the absence of ideals and moral values among the youth of the land. It is unquestionably a serious problem, the most serious that confronts the nation and the world today. If the universities in this country can contribute to its solution, they will place all Filipinos and all men heavily in their debt.

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<sup>4</sup> Discourse 5 (C. Harrold ed., 1947, p. 107).