Comment and Response

EDITOR'S NOTE: The articles appearing in this section are a result of the invitation in CJE/RCE, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 1-5 for readers' comments. In every case, authors of previously published articles will be given an opportunity to respond to commentators. The invitation for readers' comments is again made in the hope that this section will become a regular feature of the journal.

Moral Education in the Schools: A Comment on Cragg*

Donald B. Cochrane
california state university northridge

In his recent article, A. Wesley Cragg (1979) concludes that (1) there are sufficiently good reasons for discouraging formal moral education programs in schools, and (2) even without such programs, schools will continue to play a vital role in moral development, for students will encounter the values inherent in all school subjects and implicit in the organization of the school.

The first conclusion is interesting if only because it is relatively unexplored in the literature; if fully developed, it could provide a useful challenge to complacent liberals who do not question their right to intervene in schools with explicit programs. For support, Cragg's position rests on a briefly sketched political argument, not — as he seems to imply — on the two philosophical sections which precede it. These two sections, as I will attempt to demonstrate, are far too unrelated and porous to establish his first conclusion, which appears in Section 3. Ironically, the stand he takes in Section 4 goes a long way toward undermining the political argument introduced to sustain his first conclusion.

The four sections of Cragg's argument are outlined as follows:

1. Despite its superficial attractiveness, the ministerial statement of aims for moral education in Ontario's *Education in the Primary and Junior Division* is deficient in that it leaves philosophical questions unre-

*This comment is made on a previously published article by A. Wesley Cragg, "Moral Education in the Schools," *Canadian Journal of Education*, 1979, *4*(1), 28-38.

solved, answers to which would have important pedagogical consequences.

2. In Ontario, the authors of the two major contending theories of moral education, Lawrence Kohlberg and Clive Beck, cannot at this time provide the basis for a moral education program based on moral reasoning because:

a. i. Kohlberg commits the is/ought fallacy in attempting to establish by means of science how people ought to reason, and

ii. Social scientists themselves are "sharply divided on the correct model for describing the nature of moral values";

b. Philosophy has failed to develop a single concept of moral reasoning, therefore Beck's proposal is only one among many possible contenders.

3. We should discourage the development of formal moral education programs in schools because the government of the day

a. Will have a direct influence on the content of what is to be taught, and

b. Finding some moral systems more palatable than others, will implement the former.

4. There are grounds for modest rejoicing because, if we are successful in our opposition to formal classes in moral education, we are reassured that schools will continue to have a vital, if indirect, role to play in moral development.

SECTION I

Philosophers are a surly bunch and never more so than when hot on the trail of slogans, persuasive definitions, and ambiguous assertions. Ministerial statements of aims are perfect fodder for the analytically trained philosopher. What Cragg notes is undoubtedly true: the meaning of and boundaries between "the integrity of the individual" and "the priorities of a concerned society" are far from clear. The consequences of this vagueness, however, may not be as damaging as he seems to think, and, in any case, they are unnecessary to further his central argument. Theoretically — but only theoretically — Ontario's teachers would be put in a quandary were they to attempt to deduce clear, uncontradictory directives for classroom practice from the guidelines. But these warm, positive utterances have a practical function other than to give guidance to teachers or to provide grist for the analytical philosopher's mill. Such general statements may serve simply to indicate that there is an official interest in an area, though, for the exact contours of that interest, it is advisable to look elsewhere. This Cragg does. Nothing much hinges on the outcomes of Section 1.

SECTION 2

While declining to undertake a critique, Cragg purports to show that the theories of Kohlberg and Beck cannot provide a foundation at this time for a moral education program based on moral reasoning. The issue here is not whether we agree with Cragg's conclusion but whether his argument is sufficient to warrant it. What does he offer us?

Cragg believes that Kohlberg commits the naturalistic fallacy, but he neither demonstrates this claim nor indicates upon whose work he would rely. On several occasions, Kohlberg (1971, 1973a, 1973b) has tried to show that he has not committed the error Cragg attributes to him. If it ever were sufficient simply to voice suspicions about what Kohlberg may have done, that time has passed; argument is needed now. But let us suppose that Kohlberg is guilty as charged — that he thinks that developmental theory can substitute for philosophical argument. Would that be enough to undermine his theory of moral development? I think not. The issue is not simply what Kohlberg thinks but what there are good reasons for believing. If we believe that Rawls and/or Kant supply an adequate description of and justification for Stage 6 reasoning, then there are grounds for maintaining much of Kohlberg's theory and resulting pedagogy. Kohlberg's theory would need to be suitably qualified but not rejected.

Cragg believes that the teacher's difficulty in deciding what course of action to take is compounded because "scientists themselves are sharply divided on the correct model for describing the nature of moral values" (1979, p. 33). In particular, "the fundamental postulates of cognitive psychology are incompatible with those of S-R theorists" (1979, p. 33). Apparently, teachers should worry about the lack of agreement among social scientists. Should the work of science teachers necessarily be disrupted if Stephen Toulmin is not seeing eye-to-eye with Karl Popper, or the work of history teachers if Patrick Gardiner and William Dray are still in dispute? Not all such disagreements require that practical pedagogy be brought to a standstill. It is true that these issues are devilishly difficult to think through; it is also true that researchers often overextend their explanations. Kohlberg and Skinner may not be exceptions to this intellectual imperialism. One of the virtues of the English philosophical tradition is to deflate such pretensions and, more constructively, to sort out the valid contributions which different programs of research can make to our understanding of complex areas of human experience and endeavor. At this stage, teachers need not be left to rely solely on their own "moral preferences"; rather they can be directed to relevant work in philosophy. Through the seminal work of R. S. Peters (1973a, 1973b, 1978), for example, they might conclude that both Kohlberg and Skinner may be making valid contributions to a larger conception of moral education than each proposes individually. The either/or dilemma proposed by

Cragg is certainly premature. But even when differences cannot be reconciled in this way, we do not necessarily have grounds for despair. It is at least conceivable that after some good, hard-headed philosophy we would conclude that one account of the nature of moral values is demonstrably inadequate — even wrong!

Alternatively, let us imagine that prominent social scientists do share fundamental postulates and achieve a consensus on the nature of morality. Would this situation be sufficient grounds for teachers, not to say philosophers, to set aside their critical faculties and proceed with moral education programs based on such agreement? Surely not, and for reasons that are only too clear.

Cragg makes a similar move intended to show that philosophy cannot succeed where the social sciences have failed: Philosophers cannot agree on the nature of moral reasoning so there is no secure basis for instruction; even Beck and Kohlberg have different conceptions of Stage 6 reasoning. In order for this to be convincing, we have to assume that this difference cannot be reconciled, thus making their theories and practical proposals incompatible. We must suppose that a "Kohlbergian student" at Stage 6 either could not, or should not, consider life goals and purposes in the manner outlined by Beck and, conversely, that a student of Beck's program who has attained a high level of reasoning could not, or should not, face certain moral sitations as dilemmas requiring the application of the principle(s) of justice. But why should we assume that the two theories are incompatible rather than complementary? Surely we can develop separate programs along the lines proposed by Beck and Kohlberg on the grounds that students are better off with the accomplishments prized by either theory than with none at all.

SECTION 3

Cragg fears the introduction of formal courses in moral education because in his view those officials responsible for such programs are unlikely to alter their commitments "by arguments designed to show the weakness of current policy and assumptions" (1979, p. 36). Governments would increase their control over the mode and content of moral thinking to be conveyed. He is apprehensive that ministry officials would choose only what was compatible with or — worse still — supportive of the interests which the government represents. Presumably, because the stakes are so high, this situation is less tolerable than it would be in subjects like French or science.

The basic issue, then, is political not philosophical. It is not the imperviousness of government to the rational resolution of theoretical problems in itself that is really troublesome but the ends to which political power might be used. Ministries might issue remarkably clear and coherent statements of aims. Beck and Kohlberg might settle their differences and

engage in a joint research project. But the problem of political power would remain.

Cragg stops short of saying that a moral educator is radical in just the way that Socrates was. The morally educated do not accept values simply because they are traditional or dominant but demand the opportunity to make their their own by carefully thinking them through. Adherence would not be secured automatically or unreflectively. They would be likely to demand that arbitrary authority in the family, school, and place of work be rationalized and that there be wider participation in the decision-making processes (Peters, 1966; Peters, 1973; Manley-Casimir, 1976-77). It is just such possible consequences that frighten some governments and some parents. Most simply have not had sufficient practice in the art of moral discourse to have much confidence in its use. Authorities such as parents, teachers, and government officials may feel very threatened by the challenge of moral reasoning and, as Kozol (1975, p. 146) has wryly noted, "No institution goes about the conscious task of subsidizing its own demotion." As in the time of Socrates, the moral educator can still be charged with corrupting the minds of the young and teaching false beliefs about the gods.

SECTION 4

Cragg could have taken his political insight to its logical conclusion; instead, he finds solace in current school practices. In the absence of a program of formal moral instruction, students will acquire the values that are an integral part of the subjects they study and learn other values from living in a "human community" such as a school (1979, p. 37).

Education in the abstract — that is, taken as a concept which can be clarified by philosophical analysis — may entail that something of intrinsic value is transmitted, but the attempt to educate in concrete circumstances is often a mixed blessing. Teachers may highlight the value of precision in translating from foreign languages, of respect for evidence in historical explanation, of sensitivity to sound and rhythm in approaching a poem, and so on, but these are seldom acquired in an unalloyed state. Other more substantial values are frequently transmitted in the process. (It is strange that Cragg's fear of the government's hand does not reach these corners.) The catalogue of racist and sexist attitudes promoted by our curriculum materials and classroom practices is long and well documented (see, for example, Gaskell, 1977). Nationalism — French and English alike — sets the framework for historical inquiry and so distorts a student's knowledge of Canadian history (Anderson, 1918; Billington, 1966; Hodgetts, 1968; Jaenen, 1970; Trudel & Jain, 1970; Stamp, 1973; Jain, 1974). Many values promoted in physical education programs make a dubious contribution to a student's moral education. In

sum, how positively the curriculum contributes to the student's moral growth is a very open question.

And what would a student be likely to learn from the "social curriculum" in a typical Canadian school? What is the "moral atmosphere" of a typical classroom (Scharf, 1974; Scharf, 1976; Reimer, 1977)? Admittedly, we cannot be sure, for little systematic research has been undertaken (in itself a revealing state of affairs). But much respectable criticism from the left makes an easy optimism difficult. Students may well be learning and accepting that schools are not "human communities," that they have no rights as persons, that the rules which govern their conditions of study are to be set exclusively by their "superiors," that they are not their brothers' and sisters' keepers, that the value of individual labor in the pursuit of self-interest is greater than co-operative effort towards a common goal, and so on (for example, see Barbagli & Dei, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Cohen & Lazerson, 1977; Henry, 1955; Henry, 1957; Lickona, 1980; Kohn, 1969; Kozol, 1975). The hidden, or "structural," curriculum (Dreeben, 1968; Jackson, 1968; Overly, 1970) may be extremely powerful in affecting the "moralities" students develop; whether it is a *moral* influence is another matter. Thus I do not see grounds for rejoicing — even mildly. No doubt the schools do have a vital, if indirect, role to play in shaping the values of students. It remains to be shown that these influences contribute to their moral education.

REFERENCES

Anderson, J. T. M. *The education of the new Canadians, a treatise on Canada's greatest educational problem.* Toronto: J. M. Dent, 1918.

Barbagli, M., & Dei, M. Socialization and political subordination. In J. Karabel & A. H. Halsey (Eds.), *Power and ideology in education.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Billington, R. A. History is a dangerous subject. *Saturday Review,* January 15, 1966, pp. 59-61.

Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. *Schooling in capitalist America.* New York: Basic Books, 1976.

Cohen, D. K., & Lazerson, M. Education and the corporate order. In J. Karabel & A. H. Halsey (Eds.), *Power and ideology in education.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Cragg, A. W. Moral education in the schools. *Canadian Journal of Education,* 1979, *4*(1), 28-38.

Dreeben, R. *On what is learned in school.* Don Mills, Ontario: Addison-Wesley, 1968.

Gaskell, J. Stereotyping and discrimination in the curriculum. In H. A. Stevenson & J. D. Wilson (Eds.), *Precepts, policy and process: Perspectives on contemporary Canadian education.* London, Ontario: Alexander, Blake Associates, 1977.

Henry, J. Attitude organization in elementary school classrooms. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry,* 1957, *27,* 17-33.

Henry, J. Docility, or giving teacher what she wants. *Journal of Social Issues,* 1955, *2*(2), 33-41.

Hodgetts, A. B. *What culture? What heritage? A study of civic education in Canada.* Curriculum Series #5. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1968.

Jackson, P. W. *Life in the classroom.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968.

Jaenen, C. Ruthenian schools in western Canada, 1897-1919. *Paedagogica Historica,* 1970, *10,* 517-541.

Jain, G. *Les manuels d'histoire du Canada au Québec et en Ontario* (de 1867 à 1914). Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1974.

Karier, C. J. Business values and the educational state. In R. Dale, G. Esland, & M. MacDonald (Eds.), *Schooling and capitalism: A sociological reader.* London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul in Association with The Open University Press, 1976.

Kohlberg, L. From "is" to "ought": How to commit the naturalistic fallacy and get away with it in the study of moral development. In T. Michel (Ed.), *Cognitive development and epistemology.* New York: Academic Press, 1971.

Kohlberg, L. The claim to moral adequacy of a highest stage of moral judgment. *Journal of Philosophy,* 1973, *18,* 630-646. (a)

Kohlberg, L., & Boyd, D. The is-ought problem: A developmental perspective. *Zygon,* 1973, *8*(3-4), 358-372. (b)

Kohn, M. *Class and conformity: A study in values.* Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1969.

Kozol, J. *The night is dark and I am far from home.* Toronto: Bantam Books, 1975.

Lickona, T. Beyond justice: A curriculum for co-operation. In D. Cochrane & M. Manley-Casimir (Eds.), *Practical dimensions of moral education.* New York: Praeger, in press.

McDiarmid, G., & Pratt, D. *Teaching prejudice.* Curriculum Series #12. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1971.

Manley-Casimir, M. On the threshold of the third century: The student and the school. *Administrator's Notebook* (The University of Chicago), 1976-77, *25*(7).

Overly, N. Z. (Ed.) *The unstudied curriculum: Its impact on children.* Washington: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1970.

Peters, R. S. *Ethics and education.* London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966.

Peters, R. S. *Reason and compassion.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973. (a)

Peters, R. S. Form and content in moral education. In *Authority, responsibility and education* (Rev. ed.). London: George Allen and Unwin Limited, 1973. (b)

Peters, R. S. The place of Kohlberg's theory in moral education. *The Journal of Moral Education,* 1978, *7*(3), 147-157.

Pottker, J., & Fishel, A. *Sex bias in the schools: The research evidence.* London: Associated University Presses, 1977.

Power, C. *Group atmosphere scoring manual.* Cambridge, Mass.: Centre for Moral Education, Harvard University, 1977.

Power, C. The moral atmosphere of the school — Parts 1 and 2. *Moral Education Forum,* 1979, *4*(1, 2).

Pratt, D. The social role of school textbooks in Canada. In E. Zureik & R. M. Pike (Eds.), *Socialization and values in Canadian society* (Vol. 1). Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1975.

Reimer, J. *A study in the moral development of kibbutz adolescents.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1977.

Scharf, P. *Moral atmosphere in the prison.* Ann Arbor, Michigan: Xerox University Microfilms, 1974.

Scharf, P. *The concept of moral atmosphere: Evaluating the moral climates of correctional facilities.* Cambridge, Mass.: Center for Moral Education, Harvard University, 1976.

Stamp, R. M. Empire Day in the schools of Ontario: The training of young imperialists. *Journal of Canadian Studies,* 1973, *8*(3), 32-42.

Trudel, M., & Jain, G. *Canadian history textbooks: A comparative study.* Studies of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, No. 5. Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1970.

Donald B. Cochrane is an Associate Professor in the Department of Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education at California State University Northridge, Northridge, California 91330. During 1978-79 he was on leave of absence at the University of British Columbia.