



# MORAL INSTRUCTION OF CHILDREN

BY  
FELIX ADLER

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## EDITOR'S PREFACE.

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MORAL education is everywhere acknowledged to be the most important part of all education; but there has not been the same agreement in regard to the best means of securing it in the school. This has been due in part to a want of insight into the two-fold nature of this sort of education; for instruction in morals includes two things: the formation of right ideas and the formation of right habits. Right ideas are necessary to guide the will, but right habits are the product of the will itself.

It is possible to have right ideas to some extent without the corresponding moral habits. On this account the formation of correct habits has been esteemed by some to be the chief thing. But unconscious habits—mere use and wont—do not seem to deserve the title of moral in its highest sense. The moral act should be a considerate one, and rest on the adoption of principles to guide one's actions.

To those who lay stress on the practical side and demand the formation of correct habits, the school as it is seems to be a great ethical instrumentality. To those who see in theoretical instruction the only

true basis of moral character, the existing school methods seem sadly deficient.

The school as it is looks first after its discipline, and next after its instruction. Discipline concerns the behavior, and instruction concerns the intellectual progress of the pupil. That part of moral education which relates to habits of good behavior is much better provided for in the school than any part of intellectual education.

There is, however, a conflict here between old and new ideals. The old-fashioned school regarded obedience to authority the one essential; the new ideal regards insight into the reasonableness of moral commands the chief end. It is said, with truth, that a habit of unreasoning obedience does not fit one for the exigencies of modern life, with its partisan appeals to the individual and its perpetual display of grounds and reasons, specious and otherwise, in the newspapers. The unreasoning obedience to a moral guide in school may become in after life unreasoning obedience to a demagogue or to a leader in crime.

It is not obedience to external authority that we need so much as enlightened moral sense, and yet there remains and will remain much good in the old-fashioned habit of implicit obedience.

The new education aims at building up self-control and individual insight. It substitutes the internal authority of conscience for the external authority of the master. It claims by this to educate the citizen fitted for the exercise of suffrage in a free gov-

ernment. He will weigh political and social questions in his mind, and decide for himself. He will be apt to reject the scheme of the demagogue. While the old-fashioned school-master relied on the rod to sustain his external authority, he produced, it is said, a reaction against all authority in the minds of strong-willed pupils. The new education saves the strong-willed pupil from this tension against constituted authority, and makes him law-abiding from the beginning.

It will be admitted that the school under both its forms—old as well as new—secures in the main the formation of the cardinal moral habits. It is obliged to insist on regularity, punctuality, silence, and industry as indispensable for the performance of its school tasks. A private tutor may permit his charge to neglect all these things, and yet secure some progress in studies carried on by fits and starts, with noise and zeal to-day, followed by indolence to-morrow. But a school, on account of its numbers, must insist on the semi-mechanical virtues of regularity, punctuality, silence, and industry. Although these are semi-mechanical in their nature, for with much practice they become unconscious habits, yet they furnish the very ground-work of all combinations of man with his fellow-men. They are fundamental conditions of social life. The increase of city population, consequent on the growth of productive industry and the substitution of machines for hand labor, renders necessary the universal prevalence of these cardinal virtues of the school.

Even the management of machines requires that sort of alertness which comes from regularity and punctuality. The travel on the railroad, the management of steam-engines, the necessities of concerted action, require punctuality and rhythmic action.

The school habit of silence means considerate regard for the rights of fellow-workmen. They must not be interfered with ; their attention must not be distracted from their several tasks. A rational self-restraint grows out of this school habit—rational, because it rests on considerateness for the work of others. This is a great lesson in co-operation. Morals in their essence deal with the relation of man to his fellow-men, and rest on a considerateness for the rights of others. “Do unto others,” etc., sums up the moral code.

Industry, likewise, takes a high rank as a citizen’s virtue. By it man learns to re-enforce the moments by the hours, and the days by the years. He learns how the puny individual can conquer great obstacles. The school demands of the youth a difficult kind of industry. He must think and remember, giving close and unremitting attention to subjects strange and far off from his daily life. He must do this in order to discover eventually that these strange and far-off matters are connected in a close manner to his own history and destiny.

There is another phase of the pupil’s industry that has an important bearing on morals. All his intellectual work in the class has to do with critical

accuracy, and respect for the truth. Loose statements and careless logical inference meet with severe reproof.

Finally, there is an enforced politeness and courtesy toward teachers and fellow-pupils—at least to the extent of preventing quarrels. This is directly tributary to the highest of virtues, namely, kindness and generosity.

All these moral phases mentioned have to do with the side of school discipline rather than instruction, and they do not necessarily have any bearing on the theory of morals or on ethical philosophy, except in the fact that they make a very strong impression on the mind of the youth, and cause him to feel that he is a member of a moral order. He learns that moral demands are far more stern than the demands of the body for food or drink or repose. The school thus does much to change the pupil from a natural being to a spiritual being. Physical nature becomes subordinated to the interests of human nature.

Notwithstanding the fact that the school is so efficient as a means of training in moral habits, it is as yet only a small influence in the realm of moral theory. Even our colleges and universities, it must be confessed, do little in this respect, although there has been of late an effort to increase in the programmes the amount of time devoted to ethical study. The cause of this is the divorce of moral theory from theology. All was easy so long as ethics was directly associated with the prevailing religious confes-



sion. The separation of Church and State, slowly progressing everywhere since the middle ages, has at length touched the question of education.

The attempt to find an independent basis for ethics in the science of sociology has developed conflicting systems. The college student is rarely strengthened in his faith in moral theories by his theoretic study. Too often his faith is sapped. Those who master a spiritual philosophy are strengthened; the many who drift toward a so-called "scientific" basis are led to weaken their moral convictions to the standpoint of fashion, or custom, or utility.

Meanwhile the demand of the age to separate Church from State becomes more and more exacting. Religious instruction has almost entirely ceased in the public schools, and it is rapidly disappearing from the programmes of colleges and preparatory schools, and few academies are now scenes of religious revival, as once was common.

The publishers of this series are glad, therefore, to offer a book so timely and full of helpful suggestions as this of Mr. Adler. It is hoped that it may open for many teachers a new road to theoretic instruction in morality, and at the same time reinforce the study of literature in our schools.

W. T. HARRIS.

WASHINGTON, D. C., *July, 1892.*

## PREFATORY NOTE.

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THE following lectures were delivered in the School of Applied Ethics during its first session in 1891, at Plymouth, Mass. A few of the lectures have been condensed, in order to bring more clearly into view the logical scheme which underlies the plan of instruction here outlined. The others are published substantially as delivered.

I am deeply conscious of the difficulties of the problem which I have ventured to approach, and realize that any contribution toward its solution, at the present time, must be most imperfect. I should, for my part, have preferred to wait longer before submitting my thought to teachers and parents. But I have been persuaded that even in its present shape it may be of some use. I earnestly hope that, at all events, it may serve to help on the rising tide of interest in moral education, and may stimulate to further inquiry.

FELIX ADLER.

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## INTRODUCTORY LECTURES.



## I.

# THE PROBLEM OF UNSECTARIAN MORAL INSTRUCTION.

It will be the aim of the present course of lectures to give in outline the subject-matter of moral instruction for children from six to fourteen or fifteen years of age, and to discuss the methods according to which this kind of instruction should be imparted. At the outset, however, we are confronted by what certainly is a grave difficulty, and to many may appear an insuperable one. The opinion is widely held that morality depends on religious sanctions, and that right conduct can not be taught—especially not to children—except it be under the authority of some sort of religious belief. To those who think in this way the very phrase, unsectarian moral teaching, is suspicious, as savoring of infidelity. And the attempt to mark off a neutral moral zone, outside the domains of the churches, is apt to be regarded as masking a covert design on religion itself.

The principle of unsectarian moral instruction, however, is neither irreligious nor anti-religious. In fact—as will appear later on—it rests on purely educational grounds, with which the religious bias of the educator has nothing whatever to do. But

there are also grounds of expediency which, at least in the United States, compel us, whether we care to do so or not, to face this problem of unsectarian moral education, and to these let us first give our attention. Even if we were to admit, for argument's sake, the correctness of the proposition that moral truths can only be taught as corollaries of some form of religious belief, the question would at once present itself to the educator, To which form of religious belief shall he give the preference? I am speaking now of the public schools of the United States.

These schools are supported out of the general fund of taxation to which all citizens are compelled to contribute. Clearly it would be an act of gross injustice to force a citizen belonging to one denomination to pay for instilling the doctrines of some other into the minds of the young—in other words, to compel him to support and assist in spreading religious ideas in which he does not believe. This would be an outrage on the freedom of conscience. But the act of injustice would become simply monstrous if parents were to be compelled to help indoctrinate their own children with such religious opinions as are repugnant to them.

There is no state religion in the United States. In the eyes of the state all shades of belief and disbelief are on a par. There are in this country Catholics, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Jews, etc. They are alike citizens. They contribute alike toward the maintenance of the public schools. With what show of fairness, then,

could the belief of any one of these sects be adopted by the state as a basis for the inculcation of moral truths? The case seems, on the face of it, a hopeless one. But the following devices have been suggested to remove, or rather to circumvent, the difficulty.

*First Device.*—Let representatives of the various theistic churches, including Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, meet in council. Let them eliminate all those points in respect to which they differ, and formulate a common creed containing only those articles on which they can agree. Such a creed would include, for instance, the belief in the existence of Deity, in the immortality of the soul, and in future reward and punishment. Upon this as a foundation let the edifice of moral instruction be erected. There are, however, two obvious objections to this plan. In the first place, this “Dreibund” of Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism would leave out of account the party of the agnostics, whose views may indeed be erroneous, or even detestable, but whose rights as citizens ought not the less on that account to be respected. “*Neminem læde*,” hurt no one, is a cardinal rule of justice, and should be observed by the friends of religion in their dealings with their opponents as well as with one another. The agnostic party has grown to quite considerable dimensions in the United States. But, if it had not, if there were only a single person who held such opinions, and he a citizen, any attempt on the part of the majority to trample upon the



rights of this one person would still be inexcusable. In the sphere of political action the majority rules, and must rule; in matters that touch the conscience the smallest minority possesses rights on which even an overwhelming majority arrayed on the opposite side can not afford to trespass. It is one of the most notable achievements of the American commonwealths that they have so distinctly separated between the domain of religion and of politics, adopting in the one case the maxim of coercion by majority rule, in the other allowing the full measure of individual liberty. From this standpoint there should be no departure.

But the second objection is even more cogent. It is proposed to eliminate the differences which separate the various sects, and to formulate their points of agreement into a common creed. But does it not occur to those who propose this plan that the very life of a religion is to be found precisely in those points in which it differs from its neighbors, and that an abstract scheme of belief, such as has been sketched, would, in truth, satisfy no one? Thus, out of respect for the sentiments of the Jews, it is proposed to omit the doctrines of the divinity of Christ and of the atonement. But would any earnest Christian give his assent, even provisionally, to a creed from which those quintessential doctrines of Christianity have been left out? When the Christian maintains that morality must be based on religion, does he not mean, above all, on the belief in Christ? Is it not indispensable, from his point