The Use of Stories in Moral Development

New Psychological Reasons for an Old Education Method

Paul C. Vitz *New York University*

ABSTRACT: Contemporary approaches to moral development and moral education emphasize propositional thinking and verbal discussion of abstract moral dilemmas. In contrast, this article proposes that narratives (stories) are a central factor in a person's moral development. Support for this position comes from recent theoretical contributions of Bruner, Sarbin, Spence, Tulving, and others, who have emphasized narrative thought *as a major form of cognition that is qualitatively different from abstract propositional or scientific thinking. In addition, over the last 10 to 20 years psychologists investigating and conceptualizing moral development have come to emphasize such processes as empathy (Hoffman), caring and commitment (Gilligan), interpersonal interaction (Haan), personal character and personality (Coles; Hogan; Staub; Rushton). It is proposed that narratives and narrative thinking are especially involved in how these processes lead to moral development and therefore that narrative should be rehabilitated as a valuable part of moral education.*

Moral education in the United States in recent decades has been in a state of decline and more recently the center of increasing controversy. The situation has been brought about by many factors both in the world of education and in society at large. Although the complexities of how the problem arose can be left to the historian and social theorist, there is little doubt today that many educators and parents are anxious to recover a satisfactory model of moral education.[1]

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Paul C. Vitz, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of Psychology, New York University, 6 Washington Pl., 8th Floor, New York, NY 10003.

[1] Some educators and parents propose that morality should be kept out of the public schools altogether and taught at home instead. This position is unsatisfactory because it is not possible to remove values from education. For example, every story used to teach reading brings with it a world view and associated values. Social studies and history books are thoroughly value laden as well. Even the structure of the school day and its extracurricular activities express particular values and morally loaded assumptions. Therefore, the only realistic response is to acknowledge as clearly as possible the values that are going to be taught.

In large part, the need to recover a satisfactory approach to moral education is based on very disturbing recent social pathologies, especially among our youth. Statistics clearly document the size of the American national problem (see Wynne & Hess, 1986). For example, there have been dramatic increases in the rates of adolescent death by homicide and suicide. The number of out-of-wedlock births has soared to about a million a year. Consider the following findings only for Whites—our more advantaged population—because these shifts are unrelated to racial discrimination or poverty. Specifically, the rates of male adolescent death by homicide and suicide increased by 441% and 479%, respectively, between the mid-1950s and 1984. Both rates have decreased slightly in the recent past, but the overall rise in homicides and suicides remains alarmingly high. During roughly the same years (1940–1985), the rate of out-of-wedlock births to adolescents rose by 621%. At different times in the last decade, all of these rates peaked at their highest points in history.

Nor are these the only indications that something is seriously wrong. The enormous growth in the use of drugs such as crack is common knowledge. Indeed the devastating effects of hard drugs has reached crisis proportions especially in our cities.

In view of these as well as other serious moral problems, such as pornography and high levels of sexually transmitted diseases, it is clear that we need to recover and implement a much more effective way of teaching morality. Now, the teaching of morality falls generally into two components: the method of teaching and the content of what is taught. Although method and content often interact and are not reliably independent, the distinction is a useful one. In this article, I will focus on the method to be used in teaching morality. On the basis of several recent major psychological contributions, I argue that narrative material is an essential component of effective moral education. This can include oral, written, or cinematic narration. In schools, literature or written narratives are the most common, although cinematic or video forms are now growing in influence. Regardless of the medium, in this article a psychological rationale is presented for the central importance of stories in developing the moral life of children.

Before taking up the psychological evidence, it will be useful to characterize briefly the most influential approach to moral education now found in psychology and the country's schools. This is the cognitive development

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model of Lawrence Kohlberg (e.g., 1971, 1981, 1984). Although Kohlberg's model has been a major contribution, it has been the object of important criticisms by significant numbers of social scientists and philosophers, and the general approach to moral education offered in this article is in some important respects a critique of Kohlberg's model.

Generally speaking, Kohlberg's model assumes that the moral life is primarily the result of the development of specific, often abstract moral principles that are capable of being expressed in verbal form. Kohlberg's widely familiar model postulates six developmental stages of moral reasoning. The model derives from Piaget's idea of stages of mental development, and Piaget's notion of the child as "a philosopher"; as a result Kohlberg's work is an innovative and major extension of Piaget's basic approach (Kohlberg, 1981, pp. 16, 56–58). Everyone begins at Stage 1 and, if given an adequately stimulating cognitive environment, will develop from Stage 1 to Stage 6. Each stage embodies a qualitatively different kind of moral reasoning and represents a form of thinking about morality independent of any particular moral content. However, Stage 6, the highest, does turn out to have a kind of content because the principle of justice is claimed by Kohlberg to be the form of moral reasoning found at the highest level. The particular principle of justice incorporated in the system is that of the philosopher Rawls (1971), and it is part of the liberal Western tradition stemming from Kant. The status of Stage 6 justice is uncertain, however, because Kohlberg has suggested that the existence of Stage 6 is no longer empirically justified (Kohlberg, 1984, p. 270). The motive force for moving to a higher stage is the experience of cognitive disequilibrium caused by conflict between one's existing stage and higher stage moral reasoning. The experience of this conflict pushes one's level of moral reasoning in the direction of the higher stage. In short, the model presents moral development as a process of abstract cognitive development, as a growth in rational competence expressed in increasingly sophisticated principles of moral reasoning.

The General Psychological Importance of Narratives

I now take up the psychological rationale for a kind of experience that is ignored or even rejected as irrelevant by most advocates of the abstract cognitive approach to morality. First, however, there is an important caveat. None of the particular positions identified in the following sections is indispensable for my argument in this article for the importance of narrative thought. That is, the views of Bruner, Sarbin, Spence, and Tulving, and the distinction between right- and left-brain hemisphere cognition or between analog and digital mental processes are each independent arguments, and all of these point toward the same general conclusion. As Perelman (1979) noted, the kind of case presented here is not "a chain of ideas of which some are derived from others according to accepted rules of inference" (p. 18). Instead the different types of evidence for a narrative psychology make up a web of related ideas all pointing to the central claim: the importance and qualitatively distinct character of narrative thought.

Two Modes of Thought: Bruner

Jerome Bruner (1986) has proposed that mental life is characterized by two qualitatively different modes of thought. He wrote,

> There are two modes of cognitive functioning, two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality. The two (though complementary) are irreducible to one another. Efforts to reduce one mode to the other or to ignore one at the expense of the other inevitably fail to capture the rich diversity of thought. (p. 11)

Bruner called one mode *propositional thinking* and the other *narrative thinking.*[2] Propositional thought consists of logical argumentation aimed at convincing one of some abstract, context-independent truth; it is *logicoscientific* and *paradigmatic;* that is, this mode of thought aims at a theoretical, formal interpretation, a general abstract paradigm for gaining understanding. By contrast, narrative thought presents concrete human and interpersonal situations in order to demonstrate their particular validity. It is a description of reality, and it is a way of seeing that aims at verisimilitude. The story mode requires imagination, an understanding of human intention, and an appreciation of the particulars of time and place.

Bruner (1986) noted that more is known about the logicoscientific or paradigmatic mode, with its public rationality and public procedures for verification, than is known about the narrative way of thinking. However, he provided important descriptions of narrative thought. Narratives focus on people and on the causes of their actions: their intentions, goals, and subjective experience. Bruner cited the classic work of Michotte (1946/1963), who showed by cinematic means that when objects, such as simple geometric shapes, move within limited constraints the viewer has the perceptual experience of seeing causality and, very likely, intentionality. That is, goal seeking, searching, and so on are basic, innate attributes of human mental life—basic and powerful enough to be part of our fundamental primitive perceptual apparatus.

Bruner also reminded us how central the properties of character, setting, and action are to the narrative mode. That is, the specifics of the people and their setting and also the details of their actions and intentions are all essential to narrative. Indeed these contextual specifics with their emotional impact are so important that literature achieves its power "through context sensitivity," whereas a work of science [achieves significance] through "context independence" (Bruner, 1986, p. 50).

For present purposes, it is important to keep in mind that narrative thought is *qualitatively* different from par-

[2] Although psychologists are just beginning to investigate narrative, literary theorists have treated the question of the nature of narrative for many years. See Mitchell (1981) for a summary of this extensive theoretical material.

adigmatic thought, which is concerned with propositions demonstrating logical or scientific universals separated from any emotional or specific context. Implicit in Bruner's position is a serious qualification of Kohlberg's model of moral development. Specifically, to the extent that a child's understanding of moral issues is an interpersonal, emotional, imagistic, and story-like phenomenon, to that same extent Kohlberg's model fails to respond to much of the child's mental life. The same serious limitation is equally relevant to Piaget's interpretation of mental growth as consisting of developmental stages of abstract cognitive structure based on qualitatively different modes of problem solving.

Narrative as a Root Metaphor and as a Life History: Sarbin, Spence

The social psychologist Theodore R. Sarbin (1986) has made a strong case for the relevance of the story or narrative as a general metaphor for understanding human conduct. He claimed that the mechanistic model of social psychology, heavily reinforced by positivistic philosophy and the 19th century understanding of natural science, is of limited utility in psychology and that even such utility is mostly exhausted.

Using the narrative metaphor, Sarbin proposed that a person's life (or periods of it) can be interpreted as a story and that this model has a rich relevance to social psychology. The story or narrative model allows psychology to make contact with the historical context of individuals and with the insights into human social behavior found in stories, drama, literature, and history. He emphasized narrative as an organizing principle for human action. Sarbin (1986) mentioned the work of Heider and Simmel (1944) who, like Michotte, made a motion picture film of geometric figures that moved in various directions and at various speeds. Observers reported the movements of the geometrical shapes as human action; that is, geometrical figures in action became narrative figures. Obviously, the tendency for humans to interpret even simple perceptual experience in terms of basic narrative categories is very strong.

One of Sarbin's major points is that people make up narratives about their own lives; that is, people typically interpret their life as a story or narrative. "Our plannings, our rememberings, even our loving and hating, are guided by narrative plots" (Sarbin, 1986, p. 11). Indeed it is almost impossible not to think this way.

For Sarbin, moral choice is particularly illuminated by understanding the relevance of a given moral issue to a person's understanding of his or her life as a story. A *self-narrative* can either be a self-constructed story of one's life, often including bits and pieces of various other stories, or an almost literal acting out of life in accordance with a narrative model. A famous example of the latter was the response of many European youths who modeled their lives on Goethe's *The Sufferings of Young Werther,* often to the point of committing suicide. The relevance of a person's self-narrative to moral choices has been convincingly developed by such varied and important psychologists and philosophers as Crites (1975), Fingarette (1971), Hauerwas (1977), and MacIntyre (1981).

Sarbin's colleagues Robinson and Hawpe (1986) also argued that narratives are "context-based, concrete and testable through ordinary interpersonal checking" (p. 114), and they inveighed against the tendency of some educators to disparge narrative thought. Robinson and Hawpe concluded by noting the special importance of narrative for moral education:

> First, where practical choice and action are concerned, stories are better guides than rules or maxims. Rules and maxims state significant generalizations about experience but stories illustrate and explain what those summaries mean. The oldest form of moral literature is the parable; the most common form of informal instruction is the anecdote. Both forms enable us to understand generalizations about the social order because they exemplify that order in a contextualized account. Second, stories can also be used as tests of the validity of maxims and rules of thumb. That is, stories can be used as arguments. Stories are natural mediators between the particular and the general in human experience. We should try to improve and refine this mode of thinking, not eschew it. (p. 124)

The psychoanalytic theorist Donald Spence in his book, *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth* (1982), has also elaborated the distinction between the two forms of knowledge being treated here. His fundamental point is that psychoanalysis is not really the archeological search for the historical or scientific truths of the patient's past. Instead, successful psychoanalysis in actual practice involves the active construction of a story about the patient's past that allows him or her to make narrative sense out of life. The strength of Spence's book comes from his description of what goes on in a psychoanalytic session in such a way that the narrative logic of psychoanalytic interpretation is made clear.

Semantic Versus Episodic Memory: Tulving

The psychologist Endel Tulving (1983) has conceptualized a great deal of the literature on memory by proposing that there are two different kinds of human memory. Basing his approach on earlier theorists as well as on extensive recent experimental evidence, he called one *semantic* memory and the other *episodic* memory. He considered the two types of memory as qualitatively distinct. Tulving's distinction is very close to the distinction between propositional and narrative thought. Semantic memory is involved "with the knowledge of the world and is independent of a person's identity and past," whereas episodic memory consists of "the recording and subsequent retrieval of memories of personal happenings and doings" (Tulving, 1983, p. 9). He claimed that episodic memory is a distinctive functional system on which relatively little work has been done.

Tulving summarized the differences between the two modes of memory by listing their many qualitative differences. Some of these differences are as follows: Semantic (propositional) memory is organized conceptually,

whereas episodic (narrative) memory is organized in time; semantic memory refers to the universe, whereas episodic memory refers to the self; semantic memory is verified by social agreement, and episodic memory by personal belief; semantic memory units consist of facts and concepts, whereas episodic memory units are of events and episodes; the content of semantic memory is something one knows, but the content of episodic memory is something one remembers. There are several other differences, but the preceding makes clear the obvious relevance of the distinction for present purposes.

With Spence, Sarbin and his colleagues, Bruner, and Tulving, it is clear that to the extent that people interpret moral issues in the context of a personal narrative, their moral life is operating in a qualitatively different realm from any propositional or logicoscientific theory, in particular from the abstract cognitive principles of Kohlberg's model.

Right Brain and Left Brain or Analog and Digital Cognition

The now well-known distinction between right and left hemisphere mental functions is directly relevant to the two modes of thought distinguished by Bruner and to the pronarrative position of Sarbin, Spence, and others. Distinctions between the cognitive processing in the two hemispheres have been well summarized by Tucker (1981). The right hemisphere is associated with spatial, imagistic representation in which sensory or cognitive elements are synthesized into wholes—a kind of *syncretic* thought; it is also implicated in general emotional processing (Buck, 1984). Left-hemisphere processing, in contrast, "is associated with analytic ideation and a linear, sequential mode of processing [and] it is particularly important in verbal and linguistic ability" (Buck, 1984, p. 101).

Thus, the right hemisphere is involved in recognition of faces, in understanding the emotional or affective meaning of language, in recognizing the sex of a speaker, and so on. Loss of or severe damage to the right hemisphere is therefore accompanied by a loss of interpersonal relationships and imagistic ideation in general and is associated with loss of the ability to understand the metaphorical meaning of language. (For summaries of research on right/left hemisphere asymmetry see also Blakeslee, 1980; Springer & Deutsch, 1985.) Subjects with only a left hemisphere (after surgical removal of the right) still have the capacity to speak and use language, but their sensory or perceptual knowledge of the world is impaired. Such a left hemisphere-only type of patient "resembles a kind of language machine, a talking computer that decodes literally what is said" (Gardner, 1974, p. 296).

It might seem initially that both of Bruner's modes of thinking are left hemisphere modes because narration obviously requires language, as does logicoscientific thought. But, left-hemisphere speech (and perception of speech) uninformed by the right hemisphere is radically different from normal speech in its loss of affective and imagistic character. This understanding can be summarized: Narrative thought is language in the service of right hemisphere cognition, and propositional thought is language in the service of left hemisphere cognition. In the first instance, for example, in the telling or writing of a story, language has a heavy emotional, and imagistic meaning, usually carried by intonation and words with associated images. In the latter case, language typically is in written form, devoid of much emotion, limited in image value, and generally context-free, in order to express the universal truth of paradigmatic knowledge.

A different but closely related distinction is also useful: that between *analog* and *digital* cognition. Analog psychological processes involve sensory and perceptual experiences, that is, mental representations that have an underlying physiological analogy to the external stimulus. For example, total neural response is greater the brighter or louder the stimulus; there are also well-known spatial analogs in the cortex closely linked to the neural activity on the retina; the tonotopic map in auditory cortex is another example of analog processing. This kind of analog activity or analog cognition may be dominated by right hemisphere activity, but the term analog cognition refers to this kind of processing regardless of its location. Digital cognition, based on symbols or codes with no physical similarity to what they symbolize, also refers to neural representation regardless of its actual location in the brain.

The advantage of the analog and digital distinction is that it breaks with the rigid right–left hemisphere location and allows one to infer the underlying type of cognition from the nature of the external stimulus. This analog–digital distinction is supported by Paivio's (1975, 1978) dual coding model in which he proposed that there are different processes underlying the coding of visual images and written words. Our concern with Paivio's model is primarily with images in memory—a more cognitive process—than with direct perception. Images are characterized as analogs or perceptual isomorphs organized in a spatial manner; in contrast, the verbal code in the verbal system involves digital linguistic codes that are discrete and sequential. Paivio also suggested that his two coding processes are generally although not necessarily always located in the right hemisphere in the case of images (analog) and in the case of words (digital) in the left hemisphere.

Tucker (1981), in his summary of right and left hemisphere differences in cognitive functioning also made a qualitative distinction, but he used somewhat different language. What is here referred to as analog cognition, Tucker called *syncretic* cognition, or knowledge by acquaintance; what is here called digital cognition he referred to as analytic cognition, or knowledge by description. Nevertheless, he was acknowledging the same important difference.

The crucial point to keep in mind is that analog and digital representations are qualitatively different, wherever they are located in the brain. The nature of the difference is described by von Neumann (e.g., 1951, pp. 6–7; also in 1958) and by the philosopher Wilden (1972). However,

the distinction is an old one. (See, for example, the discussion of Charles Pierce in Alston, 1967; also Cassirer, 1953; Langer, 1942.) This same difference is true of language in general as it attempts to express images: No word can directly express spatial information (Spence, 1982, was acutely aware of this difficulty; so also were Barthes, 1977; Foucault, 1973; Goodman, 1968). Only indirect communication of images is possible using words. Through association and sometimes through analog sound symbolism, the word elicits the image; presumably, this happens most often, if not always, in the reader's right hemisphere (e.g., Paivio, 1975). This kind of communication of analog meaning—communication that depends on the selection of words with associated images and loaded with emotion—is an area in which story tellers, and poets in particular, excel.[3]

MacIntyre (1981) and Meilaender (1984) provided philosophical support for the psychological understanding of concrete or analog experience. They were especially concerned with how this experience bears on moral development. MacIntyre noted that for Rawls and modern thinkers in general, rules abstracted from personal context become the primary basis of the moral life and human character or virtues become mere sentiments "prized only because they will lead us to follow the right set of rules" (p. 112). MacIntyre then commented that from his perspective and from that of many nonmodern philosophers (e.g., Aristotle, Aquinas, and even Nietzsche), the generation of morality is the other way around: "We need to attend to *virtues* in the first place in order to understand the function and authority of rules" (p. 112). That is, morality is grounded in personal emotional experience and should be understood as inductively justified from personal virtues. Meilaender exemplified this dependency of moral theory on embodied, nonabstract experience, by writing that what a person will see in a moral situation depends not on moral rules but on what a person cares about. Therefore, the question "How do children come to care?" is the fundamental moral issue. (This is a question that Meilaender 1984, p. 93, took from Richard Peters, 1971.) This question brings us back to emotion, empathy, and what is here termed analog cognition. It is time to acknowledge the relevance to the psychology of moral development of Pascal's famous aphorism, "The heart has its reasons that reason doesn't know."

The "reasonableness" of imagistic and narrative types of thinking has been defended extensively by Chaim Perelman (1979), who justified using analogy, interpersonal experience, natural moral principles, symbolic meanings, and other kinds of reasoning common in the humanities. His work has helped to rescue *practical reasoning* from neglect. This kind of thinking is typically used to understand human behavior in legal proceedings and in ordinary daily life (see the section on Haan's views that appears later in this article). Perelman has revitalized and legitimated much of our nonpropositional, nonparadigmatic thought. Like the other thinkers discussed here, Perelman rejected formalism (i.e., propositional thought) as the only basis for rationality.

Interpretations of Moral Development Consistent With Narrative Thought

Empathy and Moral Development: Hoffman

If there are two such modes of mental life and if the Kohlberg model is primarily focused on digital or propositional mental life then a new issue arises: Are there approaches to understanding moral development that acknowledge or at least implicitly do justice to the narrative or analog mode of thought? There are a number of such approaches, one of which is that of Martin Hoffman, which he developed over the last 15 years or so (e.g., 1970, 1975a, 1978, 1983, 1984).[4] Hoffman's work on moral development begins with the well-documented, universal tendency of children to empathize with others. Hoffman (1987) defined empathy as "a vicarious affective response that is more appropriate to someone else's situation than to one's own" (p. 48). Although empathy is basically an emotional response to simple perceptual experience, it soon develops a cognitive component: Older children and adults generally know, of course, that they are responding to something happening to someone else. Knowledge of interaction with others allows one to have considerable understanding of how another might be feeling. This kind of knowledge requires direct interpersonal experience in which one learns from such cues as facial expression, tone of voice, or body posture. This kind of analog cognition, as it is called here, develops into a narrative mode in which a person evaluates the morality of his or her actions on the basis of the anticipated consequences for other people. Hoffman's concern for emotion and interpersonal evaluations has made him reject the assumption that morality is derived from general abstract rationalistic principles. Hoffman's later discussion of moral issues as involving scenarios of who might be victimized by an action shows his model's narrative concern. In addition, his understanding of morality in children, even its rudimentary expression in those under two years of age, contrasts sharply with the notion of early cognitive stages, for example, preconventional stages, which have no convincing rationale for the early helping behavior shown by

[3] In two important articles, Zajonc (1980, 1984) argued for the independence of emotion and cognition. I believe it is fair to say that he is arguing for the frequent independence of emotion from digital or left hemisphere cognitive activities. For example, Zajonc claimed that the right hemisphere and simple emotional responses are linked. In the present framework, relatively simple perception, perceptual memory, and imagination are considered analog cognition, and as such can be expected to be closely tied to emotion in all perceptual systems from olfaction to vision. Thus, the present position is in agreement with the proposal that analog processing is much more tied to emotion and that the emotional component can at times function independently of higher order (digital) cognitive appraisal. (Buck, 1984, referred to such analog emotion as Emotion III, e.g., pp. 111, 117–118.)

[4] There is empirical evidence supporting empathy as a factor in moral behavior; however, the findings are not specifically tied to Hoffman's approach. See the extensive review of the literature by Eisenberg and Miller (1987), who concluded that "low to moderate positive relations were generally found between empathy and both prosocial behavior and cooperative/socially competent behavior" (p. 91).

children long before any verbalizable moral principle is possible (see Radke-Yarrow & Zahn-Waxler, 1984.)

Much of this early empathy is aroused by situational and nonverbal cues mediated by what Hoffman called *shallow cognitive* processing. In the present context, shallow cognitive processing is understood as involving perception, imagination, and image memory (i.e., analog cognitions) or simple verbal messages heavily loaded with images and emotional meaning.

Empathic responses can, as the child develops, easily lead to his or her postulating of moral principles. Hoffman has provided an important place for abstract moral principles as derived from or linked to concrete empathic experience, but he has not viewed such principles as similar to those developed by Kohlberg (M. L. Hoffman, personal communication, February 1989); instead, they are more like those proposed by Damon (1977, 1988). For example, if a person observes highly disadvantaged people in a context in which the extravagant life-style of others is salient, one may feel what Hoffman called *empathic injustice* (Hoffman, 1987, p. 56). Perhaps more important for present purposes is the contrast between victims' plight and their conduct or character. If victims are viewed as bad, their fate may seem deserved, and one's empathic and sympathetic distress might decrease. If victims are viewed as basically good, however, or at least as not bad, immoral, or lazy, one might view their fate as unfair. One's empathic distress (or sympathetic distress, guilt, or empathic anger—whichever is appropriate) may then be expected to increase.

As an example of empathic injustice Hoffman (1987) cited a 14-year-old Southern male "redneck" described by Robert Coles. After several weeks of joining his friends in harassing the black children who were trying to integrate his school, this boy, a popular athlete, said that he

> began to see a kid, not a nigger—a guy who knew how to smile when it was rough going, and who walked straight and tall, and was polite. I told my parents, "It's a real shame that someone like him has to pay for the trouble caused by all those federal judges."
>
> Then it happened. I saw a few people cuss at him. "The dirty nigger," they kept on calling him and soon they were pushing him in a corner, and it looked like trouble, bad trouble. I went over and broke it up. . . . They all looked at me as if I was crazy. . . . Before [everyone] left I spoke to the nigger. . . . I didn't mean to. . . . It just came out of my mouth. I was surprised to hear the words myself: "I'm sorry." (Coles, 1986, pp. 27–28)

Such a transformation, according to Hoffman, is based on direct interpersonal identification with the other. The fact that he "began to see" indicates a process rooted in empathy. It should be noted that it was the visibly impressive character or virtues of the black youth—his walking "tall" and being "polite" in the face of his adversaries—that established the basis for the identification.

Hoffman (1987) gave various examples of the connection between narrative and empathy. Consider a professor who is asked to write a letter of recommendation for one of his students who is applying for an important job. The student is good but not outstanding. If the professor has some friendship with the student and knows other things about the student (such as that there is a sick child in the student's family), he might write a strong letter of support. But things get complicated if the professor also empathizes with a colleague who needs an especially outstanding applicant, or with the other candidates applying for the job, some of whom can be presumed to be superior to the first student. It is this kind of narrative reasoning, based on empathic understanding of others who will be affected by one's decision, that characterizes much of real moral life. Note also that the images and cognition that are part of the empathy-inspired narrative function to generate more empathy, which in turn may trigger additional cognitions and so on. Thus, a self-constructed internal moral narrative is an interactive sequence of empathy and cognition. Indeed, as Hoffman noted, it is hard to think of moral encounters in everyday life that do not involve potential victims. It is the *imagining* of such scenarios, or little stories, that constitutes a fundamental aspect of moral "reasoning."

The Caring and Interpersonal Approach: Gilligan; Haan

Carol Gilligan (1977, 1982) has recently challenged Kohlberg's emphasis on abstract rational principles (e.g., justice) by providing evidence that women typically approach moral conflict differently from men. Her position is that women much more often than men focus on the interpersonal aspect of morality and on minimizing suffering. (Gilligan's observations are based on extensive interviews with women facing interpersonal crises.) Gilligan has opted for a morality of caring (or mercy), and she has criticized Kohlberg's model as being unduly male-oriented in its approach to moral issues. The major usefulness of Gilligan's work here is her description of women's typical moral thought processes:

> The proclivity of women to reconstruct hypothetical dilemmas in terms of the real, to request or supply the information missing about the nature of the people and the places where they live shifts their judgment away from the hierarchical ordering of principles and the formal procedures that are critical for scoring at Kohlberg's highest stages. This insistence on the particular signifies an orientation to the dilemma and to moral problems in general that differs from Kohlberg's stage descriptions. (1977, p. 512)

Gilligan thus described women's preference for the narrative over the paradigmatic mode in responding to moral issues. Women's concern for the concrete, the interpersonal, and the avoidance of pain also represents a tendency toward analog cognition and empathic responses in moral questions. Gilligan's emphasis on empathy (noted by Gilligan, 1982, especially in reference to Chodorow, 1978) makes her observations consistent with Hoffman's model. The greater propensity of girls and young women for empathy and moral internalization has been documented by Hoffman (1975b, 1977).

Norma Haan has further enriched our understanding of the relevance of interpersonal experience to morality.

Her research (Haan, 1983, 1985; Haan, Aerts, & Cooper, 1985) investigated the psychological process underlying change in moral development. Kohlberg assumed that cognitive disequilibrium—a kind of "cognitive dissonance"—promotes the development of competent moral reasoning. This cognitive tension or disequilibrium is created by discussion that exposes a child to the thought of other people at the next highest stage. The experience of disequilibrium combined with learning about the logic of the next highest moral stage allows the child to move up to the next stage. Kohlberg's view of this process is found as early as Turiel (1966) and is reiterated in Kohlberg (1984, pp. 79–80). Haan (1985) was dubious about this proposed process. Instead she saw morality not as a form of cognitive competence but as a "social, emotional dialectic of practical reasoning among people" (p. 996). Critical to her position "is the assumption that even the very young understand basic human reciprocity" (p. 997). (To support this assertion, Haan cited Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-Waxler, & Chapman, 1983.) For Haan, like Hoffman, the natural elaboration of empathy leads children to an awareness of reciprocity or fairness.

Haan (1985) presented a number of group experiments in which the effects of cognitive disequilibrium versus interpersonal conflict are compared for their effect on development. She concluded that

> development seems to rise out of the emotional, interactive experience of moral–social conflict and not from the cognitive experience of finding that one's reasoning is in disagreement with another's higher stage thinking; . . . Full incorporation of the influences of social interaction would surely have to result in fundamental change in the basic structure of [Kohlberg's] theory. (p. 1005)

The Coles (1986) example, cited earlier, involving the 14 year-old southern White boy who suddenly found himself stopping the harassment of a Black youth is an example of Haan's position, as well as of Hoffman's. In short, for Haan, moral development is rooted in emotional and conflictual interpersonal experience and socialization. It is this that develops a person morally by promoting his or her practical understanding of intentions, actions, and their consequences for others (e.g., practical reasoning, Perelman, 1979). In Haan's position, the best environment for moral development is one in which the person can experience moderate amounts of interpersonally based moral conflict (too much conflict, of course, would be debilitating). Besides actual, lived, interpersonal conflict, stories could also facilitate the development of moral thought. After all, narratives through vicarious experience provide a rich array of exactly such situations. Good empirical evidence for this assumption remains to be established, however.

Morality and Personality: Hogan, Staub, and Others

In recent years, psychologists have studied the determinants of what is generally called *prosocial behavior.* They have focused on how personality, early learning experiences, and social factors interact so as to affect a person's tendency to help others. (See Staub 1978, 1979; Staub, Bar-Tal, Karylowski, & Reykowski, 1984; also see Hogan and his colleagues: Hogan, 1973; Hogan & Busch 1984; Sloan & Hogan, 1986).

Sloan and Hogan wrote that because moral decisions are mediated by consciousness they "can only be comprehended as a function of *personality.* By personality, we mean the relatively stable constellation of self-interpretations (and self-presentations), that through complex systems of affect and imaging, guides individual choices" (p. 169). Moral responses "express a compromise between the demands of inner needs and the requirements of social living" (Sloan & Hogan, 1986, p. 169). They noted that many of these inner needs may be unconscious and that they are closely tied to lifelong experience with others, especially parents, as well as religious and political figures, heroes, and so on. Therefore, our moral decisions often express repetitive patterns derived from only vaguely understood needs and emotions. Sloan and Hogan have reminded us (among other things) not to forget the central contribution of personality theorists such as Freud, Jung, Lacan, and Erikson that unconscious personality factors are central to how we respond to moral issues. (For a treatment of this insight with respect to altruism from an object relations position, see Sharabany, 1984.)

For both Sloan and Hogan, moral deliberation is usually a social not a solitary process. Even when one deliberates alone, moral reflection is often an internalized conversation among the various voices of one's conscience, for example, father, mother, church, and peer group. Clearly, they rejected the notion of moral deliberation involving only the single internal voice of some "autonomous" self.

From their emphasis on personality and its interpersonal origins Sloan and Hogan (1986) stated, "It is impossible to define *a priori* the specific characteristics of moral development without reference to a given individual in a concrete situation" (p. 176). Such a statement with its endorsement of context and the particular individual clearly implies support for narrative as relevant to moral education.

The evidence supporting the idea that positive morality (the *thou shalts*) is a function of personality (and context) is now quite extensive. Staub, a leader in this research, wrote,

> During the past decade and a half there has been a revolutionary increase in the amount and variety of research and theorizing about the determinants and development of behaviors that benefit other people—such as helpfulness, kindness, generosity cooperation—which have been jointly called prosocial behaviors. (Staub et al., 1984, p. xxiii)

Staub's (1974, 1978) own interpretation of the evidence for a "pro-social moral orientation" has three major components: a positive evaluation of human beings, a concern for the welfare of others, and a feeling of personal responsibility for others.

There are many others with important contributions to "personality" as a factor in moral behavior, and almost

all of this research is antithetical to the abstract propositional approach to morality. Radke-Yarrow and Zahn-Waxler (1984) have demonstrated the existence of helping behavior by age two and have shown how early childhood socialization experiences contribute to such prosocial behavior. Schwartz (1970; Schwartz & Howard, 1981, 1984) described how internalized values act as motivators of altruism. Reykowski (1982, 1984) and his colleagues (e.g., Karylowski, 1977, 1982, 1984) have provided much evidence for interpreting prosocial behavior as the expression of the individual personality.

As for the influence of social context on moral behavior, the classic research by Latané and Darley (1970) on bystander intervention is well known as documenting this important factor. Like Hogan, the preceding psychologists all acknowledge and integrate into their theory both individual and social context factors in conceptualizing moral behavior.

It is this "character and context" approach to the moral life that is how narratives represent our moral choices. Thus, as contrasted with abstract propositional arguments, stories are far more likely to really engage the reader or listener and, with the aid of other factors, develop a person's moral life.

Character and Morality: Coles

Robert Coles has for some years given sensitive portrayals of children from around the world as they confronted concrete moral and political issues. His writing, which is closer to the literary quality of a Charles Dickens than to today's "scientific" psychology provides many case histories that constitute support for the importance of a child's character in how the moral life is expressed and develops.

In his detailed descriptions of children caught in moral crises, Coles (e.g., 1986) has shown, first, how morality is primarily expressed in action, and second, that it is rarely verbalized in terms of abstract principles. It is out of the interaction of character and situation that moral behavior, often of a very high and impressive, but frequently inarticulate, kind emerges. Coles also provided support for the social interaction and personality positions of Haan, Staub, Hogan, and so on. Coles, especially in his treatment of Black children during the desegregation period of the 1960s, identified the importance of Bible stories as sources of their moral response. (See Coles's, 1986, moving portrayal of Ruby Bridges, who day after day stood up to a White mob protesting her attending a White school, e.g., pp. 9, 22–27.)

Coles himself was explicit about his lack of sympathy with the notion of abstract moral stages of development that are dependent on growing cognitive sophistication, and he refused to accept cognitive sophistication as a measure of the moral life (e.g., Coles, 1986, pp. 21, 26–27). He opposed the moral elitism inherent in such cognitive approaches. After all, most of the impressive moral responses Coles described come from children far too young for the cognitive sophistication required for even a Stage 4 morality in Kohlberg's system.

Although it is not possible to summarize Coles's work because his evidence is itself too close to a narrative to be captured by abstract statements, at least four principles and a hypothesis can be derived.

1. Moral life is best understood by actual behaviors that arise from real experience, not verbal responses to hypothetical moral dilemmas.
2. Moral responses reflect a person's character, personality, and particular social situation in ways that are complex and not reducible to abstract propositions.
3. Children typically understand their actual moral behavior as having a narrative meaning in the context of their life.
4. Morally structured stories or narratives, often of a religious kind, provide strong support and inspiration for children, and their own moral responses are often deeply rooted in their previous experience with narratives.

From these general Colesian principles one can draw a simple educational hypothesis; namely, a very effective way to introduce children to the moral life, short of actually placing them in morally challenging situations, is to have them hear, read, or watch morally challenging narratives.

Karl E. Scheibe (1986) supported much of the Coles, Spence, and Sarbin position. Scheibe's major point was that people interpret their life as a kind of narrative, and he focused on the adventure story as having a special significance. Scheibe commented that the need for adventure or excitement is not only intense and common, but it is a need that gets satisfied by having adventure structured in story form. Such adventure narratives are often central to the development of a person's life story, to an adequate "self-narrative" (Mancuso & Sarbin, 1983). Scheibe pointed out that much of the great popularity of sporting events can be attributed to narratively organized adventure. The very format of a game in which one team wins and the other loses makes football, soccer, baseball, and so on examples of short stories.

An Educational Rationale

There is also a good deal of educational evidence for the use of narrative in moral and character education that closely supports the psychological rationale.

The Popularity of Narratives

It is a commonplace observation that millions of people voluntarily spend countless hours listening to, reading, or watching narratives. Most of television consists of stories of one sort or another—from the soap operas to the Super Bowl. The popularity of novels, romances, comic books, mystery stories, and westerns again demonstrates how widespread is the human need for narrative. Anthropologists have long observed the popularity of stories in every culture.

By comparison, the abstract and propositional conceptualization of any subject is a rare phenomenon and found only in highly intellectualized populations. Given this enormous popular "narrative need," one would think that educators might wish to rediscover how to harness

the power of the human response to narrative material. Presumably education should work with human nature rather than against it. In fact, the abstract, juiceless quality of so much instruction in our contemporary schools is a very likely contributor to the popularity of TV and movies in the lives of students once they escape from the classroom.

The Lesson of the Great Tradition

An overlooked and major type of support for the use of narrative in moral and character education has been its common use in the educational history of the West. For hundreds, indeed thousands of years, stories have been central to education in the Western cultural heritage. This educational heritage, sometimes called the Great Tradition, has been advocated recently as relevant to our educational crisis by several educational theorists (e.g., Kirk, 1978; Wynne, 1985/1986). The Great Tradition is not, of course, homogeneous in all respects. From its inception, it was rooted in both Athens and Jerusalem, and these two strands—the Classical/Renaissance/Enlightenment tradition and the Jewish/Catholic/Protestant tradition—are often at odds with each other. Nevertheless both traditions agree on much, including many of the basic virtues. At any rate, all parties to the Great Tradition, until quite recently, agreed on the importance of narrative for teaching morality and building character, especially for children. Indeed, this use of stories is found not just in the West, but wherever people have passed on their moral and cultural heritage to their children. The use of stories is one of the few universal aspects of moral education. From such unanimity it seems reasonable to conclude that stories have substantial educational utility. A clear policy implication and testable hypothesis is that stories should be more effective at teaching morality than the present nonnarrative approaches.

The Case for Virtues

One reason why narratives are now rejected is because teaching through stories has been linked to the long persisting tradition of character education, in turn based on the assumption that the schools can and should teach virtue. The link between education in virtue and the use of stories is direct because a major purpose of many stories is precisely to exemplify good and bad character, virtues and vices in practice. Sarbin (1986, p. 19), for example, explicitly called for the study of virtue based on a narrative model.

The "virtues" approach to moral education, which is still found in and sometimes even cogently advocated for our schools (e.g., Hicks, 1981; see also Kirk, 1982) was until fairly recently the predominant position.

One of the major pieces of research used to reject the older approach is that of Hartshorne and May (1928; Hartshorne, May, & Maller, 1929; Hartshorne, May, & Shuttleworth, 1930) whose volumes describing the results of an extensive series of studies done in the 1920s are often cited as presenting evidence against the teaching of virtues by *any* method. The older critiques of the Hartshorne and May research are, however, seriously flawed. First, they failed to acknowledge the many findings of Hartshorne and May that in fact support the teaching of virtues and character development. For example, certain high morale schools and teachers did produce students who behaved better (Hartshorne & May, 1928, pp. 323, 338), and teacher ratings of trustworthiness did correlate with behavioral measures of honesty (e.g., Hartshorne & May, 1928, p. 410).

It is true that Hartshorne and May concluded that their results did not support the position that such traits as honesty, for example, are consistent across all settings. That is, moral behavior was at times found to be specific to the particular setting or kind of temptation. Such a finding would not surprise most virtue-oriented moralists, and it certainly would not surprise novelists or storytellers for whom character is complex and context is always important. In any case, Hartshorne and May's studies taken at face value are consistent with a general honesty factor as part of personality or character, but with specific and situational qualifications.

Even more important, however, is the very strong case for the Hartshorne and May position made by the psychologist Rushton (1980, 1984), who reanalyzed the Hartshorne and May data. He pointed out the high correlations, typically of the order of .50 and .60, between teacher ratings of children's honesty and the more reliable Hartshorne and May measures based on combining behavioral tests (Rushton, 1984, p. 273). Rushton thus showed that Hartshorne and May's results have been consistently misunderstood in the psychological literature. Rushton (1984, p. 273) concluded that

> not only did total scores within the battery of altruism tests and measures yield evidence of consistency, but so too did measures of self-control, persistence, honesty, and moral knowledge. Indeed there was evidence for a pervasive general factor of moral character (e.g., Hartshorne et al., 1930, p. 230, Table 32).

Rushton also mentioned that a somewhat similar positive interpretation of Hartshorne and May was first published by Maller (1934) and the same more positive evaluation was reinforced later by another re-analysis of the Hartshorne and May data by Burton (1963). On the basis of this and much other evidence such as the studies of Dlugokinski and Firestone (1974), Krebs and Sturrup (1974), Rushton (1980), and Rushton and Wheelwright (1980), he concluded that there is a trait of altruism in which some people are consistently more empathic, generous, helping, and kind than others and that this trait is readily perceived by others. Rushton (1984) also concluded that the consistently altruistic person is likely to have an integrated personality, strong feelings of personal efficacy and well-being, and what generally might be called *integrity* (1984, p. 279).

From this kind of work, it is clear that the notion of moral traits or virtues is alive and well within contemporary psychology. Theoretical support for the traditional concept of the virtues has also received very extensive treatment in the writings of major philosophers in the

last two decades (Dykstra, 1981; Foot, 1978; Geach, 1977; Hauerwas, 1981; MacIntyre, 1981; Meilaender, 1984; Murdoch, 1970; Perelman, 1979; Pieper, 1966; Wallace, 1978).

Finally, in the most extensive longitudinal study of moral character, Peck (1960) reported substantial evidence for different reliably measured moral traits that are stable over time and consistently related to good character. This important study in most respects supported a character and social context approach to moral development.

The Problem of Indoctrination

Probably the most effective objection to the narrative approach by theorists emphasizing propositional thought has been that stories involve more or less direct teaching of particular content, and thus involve *indoctrination.* In contrast, for example, Kohlberg claimed that his position avoids indoctrination. Kohlberg has maintained (e.g., 1981, 1984) that the basic theoretical rationale of his model is morally neutral and does not involve ideology or a violation of moral neutrality. This claim gives a special "objective" status to his model. However, Kohlberg's critics have identified many ideological biases in his system—biases that mean Kohlberg's model is, in fact, a form of indoctrination just like all other theories of morality.

Besides the feminist critique, the most serious criticisms have focused on the rationalist and individualist assumptions embedded in Kohlberg's model. These assumptions are a consequence of the Western liberal Kantian philosophic position, as represented recently by Rawls (1971), that underpin Kohlberg's model. This emphasis by itself is a bias because Kohlberg's presuppositions ignore duties, social context, and many other issues (see Sloan & Hogan, 1986). To ignore something involves a value judgment. The rationalistic assumption is also rejected by many who see morality as rooted in interpersonal loyalty and childhood experience, unconscious processes (Sharabany, 1984), social or religious assumptions (e.g., Dykstra, 1981; Neuhaus, 1984), and so on. Any given philosophic position is obviously subject to serious doubts or counter arguments. The point is that the particular philosophic positions embedded in Kohlberg's approach are rejected by many. (For examples of articles that identify ideological bias in Kohlberg's work, see Bennett & Delattre, 1978; Hogan & Busch, 1983; Hogan & Emler, 1978; Levin, 1982; Sampson, 1981; Shweder, 1982; Simpson, 1974; Sullivan, 1977; Vitz, 1985; Wolterstorff, 1980.)

In short, it now seems clear that there is no way to avoid indoctrination; the best one can do is to consciously acknowledge the problem and openly identify what kind of indoctrination is taking place.

Narratives as Laboratory Material

One may view narratives as the laboratory of moral life. Except for occasional service projects for the school or the community at large, there is relatively little direct practice in morality that schools can provide. But stories allow the child a vicarious experience of a much wider moral world. Of course, this experience should not be left without moral reflection, guided by a teacher and others. The point is that just as music is far more than music theory and football is more than the books on it, so the moral life is far more than abstract dilemmas and propositions. It is narratives that provide an almost endless detailed and lifelike description of the moral dilemmas people actually experience. Narratives allow us to stop talking about the moral life and to point to it instead. Actions have long been acknowledged as more important than words. In stories, literally (as in movies), or at least in the mind's eye, moral action can be seen.

In Defense of Moral Reasoning

All this is not to say that moral education should consist exclusively of narratives for instruction in virtue. All the theorists cited, from Bruner to Hoffman to Coles, would presumably endorse the use of reasoned reflection on the moral significance of stories. It is also reasonable to assume that they would support the use of reason to arrive systematically at generalizations and principles of the moral life. As noted, Hoffman (1987) explicitly developed this in his empathy model by showing how empathic experiences lead to the development of a more abstract or cognitive understanding of morality. Staub (personal communication, 1987) also supports integration of the concrete and emotional with more abstract and cognitive knowledge. Presumably it is in the interaction of emotional analog experience, such as empathy, with more abstract digital understanding that the highest forms of moral knowledge are developed. In spite of present criticisms of Kohlberg and of Piaget, future cognitive and rationalistic knowledge of moral development will owe much to them. Indeed, the work of Damon (1977, 1988) already owes much to Kohlberg.

It is also likely that there will not be only one theoretical model of morality applicable to all people. More likely, in spite of our developing a deeper and more accurate understanding of how improvements in moral education can proceed, there will still remain conflicting moral visions, with their different philosophical and psychological rationales. To accept such differences and to learn to live with them might eventually permit psychology to contribute more than it has thus far to that supreme form of moral knowledge: wisdom.

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