

## EIR Reviews

# Can you fight a conspiracy, if you say it doesn't exist?

by Valerie Rush

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### **Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong: Moral Illiteracy and the Case for Character Education**

by William Kilpatrick

Simon and Schuster, New York, 1992

366 pages, hardbound, \$23

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Kilpatrick's newest book on the lack of moral, or what he calls "character," education in the schools is a useful, if flawed, contribution to the war that parents and other citizens have begun to wage against the New Age takeover of the American public school system. His review of the drug-, sex-, and "life skills" education programs that now dominate so much of our children's schooltime concludes that the non-judgmental, value-free, "me"-centered approach of these programs is not only deliberately designed to shatter traditional family- and church-centered values, but is creating a generation of moral illiterates "who know their own feelings, but don't know their culture."

In particular, he takes aim at the so-called "affective education" model that, since the 1960s, has infiltrated classrooms nationwide from its California spawning grounds at the Esalen and Western Behavioral Science Institutes. Kilpatrick traces the evolution of the affective, or "human potential," movement created by Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow from its 1950s roots as a (questionable) form of psychotherapy for the emotionally disturbed to its now widespread application in virtually every public school curriculum across the country. Rogers was one of the founders of the "sensitivity" or "T-group" session which facilitated the

flowering of the drug-rock counterculture in the 1960s.

Under the guise of helping children to "discover their own values" (values-clarification) and develop "critical thinking" skills, says Kilpatrick, the affective education model has "helped create an educational system with a de facto policy of withholding from children the greatest incentive to moral behavior—namely, the conviction that life makes sense." Self-esteem, once judged a by-product of achieving something worthwhile, of making a contribution to society, is today defined in the schools as "self-acceptance." The central message of all of these affective programs is "you're fine as you are," "you are you, and that is enough," and so forth. The Platonic argument for teaching children to fall in love with virtue, says Kilpatrick, has been replaced with the hedonistic philosophy of falling in love with oneself, of judging the good to be "whatever gives me pleasure."

In his chapter on affective drug-education programs, such as Quest, Dare, and Smart, Kilpatrick documents the repeated failure of these programs to curb drug abuse. Study after study of these programs yields the incontrovertible proof that tobacco, alcohol and drug abuse *dramatically increases* as the result of these non-judgmental programs which eschew "authoritarian guidance" (i.e. defining right and wrong) and which turn educators into "neutral facilitators" of "self-discovery" sensitivity sessions. As Kilpatrick observes, these programs' emphasis on self-expression, rejection of authority, and the quest for the true inner self is "indistinguishable from the philosophy that inspired the original outbreak of wide-scale drug experimentation" in the 1960s.

Standard sex education manuals used in junior and senior high schools regularly advise students to "tune out" their parents' voices, to "make your own choices," and to develop tolerance for the choices of others. As Kilpatrick notes, these

programs have “resulted in classrooms where teachers act like talk show hosts,” where the merits of different forms of contraception, techniques of masturbation, and the whole gamut of sexual acts are discussed in a “value-free” environment. With the emphasis entirely on “safe” sexual techniques, says Kilpatrick, “the link between character and sex” is eliminated.

### **Multicultural obscenities**

Kilpatrick is most courageous when he takes on that political obscenity known as “multiculturalism,” or “political correctness.” As he admits, “Being against multiculturalism is a little like being against motherhood.” He blasts “feminist” curricula which define morality as a “male value,” and such ethnic programs as “Afro-centrism” and “indigenism,” which deemphasize and distort western civilization while fabricating new versions of black or Indian history in order to “boost the self-esteem” of minority students. Says Kilpatrick, these curricula are not efforts to teach history and culture but are rather invasive forms of psychotherapy. “Self-acceptance, rather than knowledge, sets the agenda.”

The real intention of the multiculturalists, suggests the author, is “to instill both cultural and ethical relativism into the heart of the curriculum. . . . From the extreme multiculturalist point of view, all cultures are created equal and no system of values is less valid than another—except, of course, traditional Western values, which are highly suspect.”

“To assign equal validity to all cultures, customs and values,” writes Kilpatrick, “is to create the educational equivalent of a Tower of Babel. The result is bound to be both cultural and moral confusion.” What is a child to do with the bits and pieces of various cultures he is offered? With the deemphasis on teaching western Judeo-Christian civilization, the child is left “adrift on a sea of relativism with no compass,” he concludes.

Kilpatrick also targets the thunder of rock music with which children are bombarded at home, on the street, and even in the classroom. He embraces Plato’s view that music and character are intimately linked. “A man raised on harmonious music,” he paraphrases Plato, “has a better chance of developing a harmonious soul.” The same is true of stories, poetry, painting, and craft. By being surrounded with nobility, grace, and beauty, says Kilpatrick, “the child can come to love justice and wisdom long before he can grasp these notions in their abstract form.” And yet, “in our society, we seem to have managed to create an erotic attachment to all the wrong things. . . . Instead of a passionate attachment to what is good, noble, and just, youth develop passionate attachments to their own needs, wants, and feelings.”

### **Knowing the enemy**

Kilpatrick’s book is an eye-opener for parents who are wondering whatever happened to the eager, inquisitive

youngster they sent off to kindergarten. Yet his concluding proposals on how to solve the moral and cultural crisis facing American society are a little like trying to cure cancer with chicken soup. He prescribes hearty doses of “character-building” stories and “singable songs” in the home, and more discipline, ceremony, and behavior codes in the schools.

He also recommends that if parents can’t find a public school free of the curse of “affective education,” they can turn to religious schools, private schools, or home-schooling. In this, he fails to consider 1) that such options are economically beyond the reach of most Americans; 2) that promoting the option of private schools fosters the very condition of an educated elite versus the illiterate “masses” that the public school system was created to prevent; and 3) that even were it possible to provide the ideal private education for one’s child, there is no avoiding the fact that that child must eventually enter a society increasingly dominated—culturally, politically, and morally—by the brainwashed victims of the New Age.

Kilpatrick’s “character-building” proposals evade the reality that what we are faced with is not some well-intentioned but misguided educational philosophy, as he suggests, but deliberate cultural warfare aimed not merely at children, but at the very fiber of our nation. As in all warfare, unless one knows the enemy, one is doomed to defeat. This is a political fight, and as children grow older, their greatest defense is to see their parents and other adults naming the enemy and fighting it, not just in the schools, but in the nation and the world.

True, Kilpatrick goes further than many critical writers today in identifying the twin evils of the Enlightenment and Rousseau’s Romanticism, reincarnated as “deconstructionism” or “post-modernism,” as the philosophical roots of “affective education.” Yet he insists that “there is no conspiracy here.” He traces the influence of Nietzsche, and Frankfurt School conspirators John Dewey, Jean-Paul Sartre, and others of their ilk, in producing the moral indifferentism that permeates American society, but still insists “there is no conspiracy here.” This is cowardice, at the very least: a refusal to face the very facts he has marshalled.

Kilpatrick’s idea of a positive alternative also falls far short of the Platonic ideal he claims to admire. The book never mentions the greatest living spokesman for that ideal, American thinker Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., who was attacked by the Communist Party 25 years ago for defending New York City teachers against the “political correctness” of that era; who has identified the evil of the National Education Association, for introducing and promoting affective education models in the schools; and who has repeatedly mapped out proposals for restoring classical curriculum to the schools (see *EIR* Vol. 19, No. 34, Aug. 28, 1992). To praise, or even discuss LaRouche’s curriculum would bring down the full wrath of the liberal education establishment. But what could be more educational?