Good character education is made up of three elements, Mr. Doyle avers - example, study, and practice. In the final analysis life is about moral choices, not about technique or spontaneous unfolding.

FROM THE TIME of the ancient Greeks to sometime in the late 19th century, a singular idea obtained: education's larger purpose was to shape character, to make men (and later, women) better people. Education and training were not confused. Education was "liberal" - from liberalis, the Latin for "free," as distinct from slave. Training was (as it remains today) narrow and functional. Education imparted fundamental knowledge - or content, as we would think of it today. It was both essential and instrumental. Mastery of content...
was the device by which one achieved mastery of self and, in turn, mastery over nature. Born naked and ignorant, humans had neither the tools - teeth that rip, claws that tear, wings that soar, or fins that swim - nor the instincts to survive on their own.

No animal is so dependent for so long as the human animal.

Yet humans need more than nurturing parents; we need a supportive social order in which to live and thrive. As Aristotle knew, we are political animals: it is our fate - which is to say, our opportunity and our obligation - to live in the polis. Without it we cannot survive. We also need time. Time and the city: we cannot live without culture. Which is to say we cannot live without language. Finally, we cannot live without values. While these three threads are analytically distinct, they are inexorably woven together.

Obvious? Perhaps, but in the present climate of education it bears repeating. Culture. Language. Values. In the beginning was the word. A religious conception, to be sure, but an anthropological one as well. One need not believe John to appreciate his insight. Culture is the set of social arrangements we have chosen to organize our lives. Language is culture's quintessential tool, for it permits us to communicate with one another and across time and space. It permits culture to come into existence and to remain over time. And values are the engine that defines and drives culture. We choose Athens or Sparta, tolerance or belligerence, the way of Cato the Elder or that of Cincinnatus.

Values are the embodiment of choices; we can choose to forbear or to indulge. Or, as the ancient Greeks and later Romans knew so well, we can choose when to forbear and when to indulge. Dionysus, the Greek god of wine (from whose name the modern name Denis is derived), stands in counterpoise to Apollo, god of reason. They exist in sharp tension: one, the god of abandon; the other, the god of restraint. Such is the enduring power of myths that they embody living truths today no less than yesterday. Today, of course, the political scientist more readily thinks of Rousseau and Hobbes - the modern exemplars of self-indulgence and self-restraint - than of Dionysus and Apollo. Indeed, as E. D. Hirsch so ably and persuasively demonstrates in his new book, The Schools We Need, it is the legacy of Rousseau, filtered through romanticism, that explains today's educational wilderness. This heritage does much to explain our cultural wilderness as well.

Self-expression rather than self-restraint, a belief that the child knows more than the adult, a conviction that children are innately good and need only to be nourished for a spontaneous unfolding to occur -- these are the ideas of Rousseau and the romantic (whether Schiller or Whitman). To any parent they even have the ring of partial truth; to be sure, there is in every child a divine spark. There is in every child the capacity for truth and beauty. Indeed, so far as we can tell, every child is hard-wired for language. But this
is an incomplete list of the child's potential. It is at best fatuous, at worst dangerous, to ignore the other side of the ledger.

Children - and the adults they become - have the potential for dreadful behavior as well as good. While children have a spontaneous capacity to listen and speak, they have no such untutored capacity to read, write, and count. So too, they have the capacity to distinguish between pleasure and pain but no untutored capacity to make moral judgments. Just as children must learn to read, they must learn to be good. Like faith, morality must be acquired. The social and psychological restraints imposed by culture are what dissuade children from "bad" behavior and incline them toward good.

As Thomas Huxley so aptly said: Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do, when it ought to be done, whether you like it or not; it is the first lesson that ought to be learned; and however early a man's training begins, it is probably the last lesson that he learns thoroughly.

It is no accident that, after the Fall, the first moral question to emerge in the Judeo-Christian (and Islamic) tradition is played out between the world's first two children. After the first child kills the second, he asks, "Am I my brother's keeper?" That is the fundamental moral issue before us all. Are we our brothers' keepers? The lesson must be learned. The problem with romantics is not their poetry but their philosophy.

At issue here is not sociobiology, or scientific theories about altruism, or modern behavioral psychology, but our history as a species. Nowhere is this history drawn more vividly or fearfully than in the 20th century. The "banality of evil," Hannah Arendt called it. To abandon education's historic mission to shape character - to fail to try to turn boys into men and girls into women - flies in the face of history and reason. It is the ultimate romantic fallacy. To build a pedagogy on romanticism, as Hirsch shows, not only invites failure; it courts disaster. It is equally dangerous to build a theory of character formation on such grounds. Even if, in some narrow, strict, scientific sense the question is still open - who is right, Rousseau or Hobbes? - we cannot frame social policy on the slender possibility that the answer may be Rousseau.

And that, put most simply, is the issue. That is the cultural divide that conservatives talk about (and, one hopes, liberals worry about). It is the case of Rousseau v. Hobbes, and the court is public opinion. Whom do you believe, Primo Levi (Survival in Auschwitz or, in the Italian, If This Be a Man) and William Golding (Lord of the Flies) or Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and William Heard Kilpatrick?

Indeed, the issue of moral education, or character education, or values education - by
whichever name it may be called is really no more and no less than the issue that pervades modern theories of pedagogy. It is process rather than content, form rather than substance. It is "critical thinking skills" as opposed to thinking critically about content; it is "learning to learn" rather than learning something substantive. Just as "rote" learning of subject matter is derided, so too is "rote" learning of values.

Derision, however, misses the point. Poorly conceived or weakly executed character education does not condemn the enterprise entire. To be sure, teaching and learning about character—just as about content—ought not to be exclusively a matter of didactic instruction or catechistic learning (though it includes both); rather, fundamental values must be internalized to the point of habituation. The child's instinctual desire to grab what he likes or hit what she dislikes is profoundly antisocial. It is not a matter of indifference; these "natural" impulses will not spontaneously resolve themselves in a socially beneficial way. To the contrary, to trust to innate goodness is to invite evil, just as to ignore Thrasyymn克斯的 assertion (in The Republic) that "justice is the right of the stronger" is to invite its realization.

A CONSERVATIVE view of education and character formation, then, has two elements that are simply framed. First, there is no such thing as a "value-free" school. (An academy for nihilists would be as close as one could come to a value-free school, and even nihilists think that "nothing" is something to value.) The issue is not whether or not a school will have values, but what those values will be. Like it or not, schools shape character.

Second, there are "good" values and "bad" values, or "right" values and "wrong" values. Or, as Aristotle knew, good knowledge and bad knowledge. These are inextricably embedded in our institutions. Like it or not, schools shape character for good or ill.

Think, for example, of the values of science and the learned professions: honesty in collecting evidence, in conducting research and analysis, and in reporting results; fidelity to the scientific method and the canons of professional ethics; accuracy and reliability in execution; openness to new ideas; avoidance of dogmatism; willingness to change conclusions upon the presentation of new evidence or analysis; and respect for the subject, for colleagues, and for self. The scientist, the doctor, the attorney, or the teacher who lies is profoundly immoral. In short, these are the values of the academic enterprise. They can be taught; they must be taught. It is a moral imperative. How are values taught, and how do schools shape character? To be sure, there is more than content at stake. There is the question of general application as well. We cannot anticipate every contingency. Just as it is both desirable and useful to know how to think critically, it is desirable and useful to act virtuously. But as Aristotle knew that people become virtuous
by behaving virtuously, so too he knew that we acquire the capacity to think critically by thinking critically. Not surprisingly, when it comes to character education, the two often blur. The most egregious example of the genre of character education is, of course, the teaching of "self-esteem," a popular concept imbued with near-mythic power in the modern era. Who could deny the importance of self-esteem? What is at issue is how one acquires it. Not through fiat or edict. There is no magic wand that can impart it. True self-esteem is acquired the oldfashioned way, by hard work. Mastery. Genuine accomplishment. Accolades and praise are both appropriate and desirable, but they must be earned. Indeed, to act otherwise is to work a cruel hoax on youngsters, leading them to believe, at least in passing, something that is patently untrue.

But if I have described what good character education is not, then of what is it constituted? Of three elements: example, study, and practice. First is the role of virtuous men and women, who, by example, model virtuous behavior. Parents first, then teachers and friends. It is no accident that the Hebrew honorific rabbi and the Japanese honorific sensei mean teacher. It is the highest compliment that can be paid by a people who honor the book and revere learning. In Fiddler on the Roof, what would Tevye do "if he were a rich man"? He would study. He would not buy a summer cottage on the Crimean Sea. He would not buy a new horse and buggy. He cares not for material things. That is example.

Remember your best teachers; odds are they were not the easiest or the least demanding. To the contrary, it is almost certain that the teachers who left an enduring impression on you, the ones who changed your life, were men and women of high moral purpose. They were teachers because they believed in their calling and the importance of the subject they were teaching, whether it was physics, soccer, or shop. Indeed, it is the high expectations the best teachers have for us that induce us to give our best. Education, in the original Latin, means to draw out. What do good teachers "draw out" of us? Not Latin or algebra or history - they fill us with those subjects. Not virtue and morality. We are not spontaneously good. Without guidance we are at best an ethical tabula rasa. No, good teachers draw out energy, enthusiasm, verve, and spirit - even courage - as they impart knowledge and model virtue.

Second, study. The basics, to be sure, but only as a vehicle to bring the exalted within reach. We learn to read not to acquire a disembodied skill called "reading" but to engage with worthwhile texts. People do not read phone books for pleasure. In school and after, they should read the ancients (The Iliad, The Odyssey, The Aeneid, Ovid's Metamorphoses, the Old and New Testaments); the great documents of citizenship (the Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights, Lincoln's Second Inaugural, Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail"); the great classics of prose and poetry (Sophocles, Shakespeare, Donne, Marlowe, Spenser); and more recent storytellers (Hemingway and
Steinbeck, Melville and Twain, Cather and Bronte). It is at this point that the connection between content and character formation is most starkly evident. These books and these writers endure precisely because they wrestle with the moral dilemmas that we all confront. They force the careful reader to engage in a dialogue about right and wrong, to make decisions and choices. But they do so in a context: they are embedded in content, just as our own moral dilemmas are. They are not disembodied.

By way of contrast, imagine the "moral development" both implicit and explicit in the "open boat" exercise urged on the young by Kohlberg's moral relativists. Students are asked to role-play, to imagine what they could ethically do if they were lost at sea in an open lifeboat with little or no food and water and only a remote hope of early rescue. Removed from the context of morality, historical experience, and maritime law, this can be no more than a shadow exercise. May starving survivors eat one of their own to stay alive? May they eat only someone who has already died, or may they extract a higher sacrifice? May they kill and eat the cabin boy because he is presumably the tastiest (and the weakest)?

As it happens, these are not idle questions, just as there are no right answers. But there are carefully thought-through answers. The Roman Catholic Church does not sanction killing someone to survive, but it does sanction consuming the body of one already dead if there is no other recourse. The British, as a preeminent maritime power, reached a different conclusion. British Admiralty Law holds that a survivor may be dispatched so that others might live, as long as he is selected in an evenhanded way. Lots must be drawn. In that open boat, the short straw has real significance. This is context with meaning. British fair play is not an empty boast.

Consider as well our Fifth Amendment, which protects us from self-incrimination. No one in America may be compelled to testify against himself. Why? Absent historical context, the right has little meaning. Why should a well-known mobster or child molester not be expected to testify about his activities and behavior? It is the long tradition of the rack and thumbscrew, of forced confession, of gross abuse of police power by the state that makes the Fifth Amendment a pearl beyond price. History offers few more compelling moral lessons. To advance the idea that children should not be instructed in these and similar areas is to profoundly misconceive the purposes of education. They will not invent this knowledge on their own, any more than they will invent algebra or English grammar. There is a body of shared moral and ethical information, fact, story, myth, and history that we must all possess.

We gain access to this information through proper study. We do not reinvent the world anew; we learn from our teachers, living and dead. This is not to say that acts of the
imagination are bad. Indeed, much of what we know is acquired by acts of imagination; we read The Red Badge of Courage and share with Stephen Crane the horrors of battle, or we read his great stories Maggie: A Girl of the Streets or "The Open Boat" and appreciate the horrors of sexual exploitation and the terror of being lost at sea. Crane is a particularly apt example: one of the first realists, he nonetheless wrote his most enduring work about the Civil War, which was over before his fifth birthday. His magnum opus was an act of the imagination for him as it is for us. Finally, there is practice. It makes perfect. Whether it is the repetition of scales or the shooting of baskets, practice is the key to success. Lab work, fieldwork, open heart surgery, oral argument, lecturing - all are improved by practice. At this level practice reveals that perseverance and hard work are singular virtues that are rewarded. And practice produces habit, one of the greatest gifts nature confers. Imagine having to remember how to tie your shoes every morning, having to relearn scales each day, or having to learn to read the newspaper anew each day. But practice has more elevated dimensions- it also means real experience, as in medical or legal practice.

The more advanced student writes expository prose and conducts organized research, performs lab work, undertakes fieldwork, interviews sources, learns the "language" of various disciplines. But the most important form of practice is the exercise of being a good person. It includes such simple things as being accurate, honorable, and punctual; respecting teachers, classmates, and self. Such behavior builds on the inner logic of scholarship and academic mastery - hard work, honesty, integrity.

The most telling point is that, as George Santayana said, "something not chosen must choose." In the final analysis, life is about moral choices - it is not about technique or spontaneous unfolding. Science and technology are servants, not masters. They are given scope and justification by their humane purposes. Not the reverse. The first lesson of culture is that children are not wildflowers; they are domestic flowers, and they require careful tending in both the academic and moral spheres. They cannot be left to their own devices; adults do know more than children - that is what school is all about.

As the great critic of romanticism Arthur Lovejoy (aptly named) pointed out, the romantic failure - its Achilles heel - is its inability to inform and inspire itself. Romanticism is received; it does not project. Put most simply, a romantic in a good mood (or a bad mood, for that matter) remains in one only till external circumstances change. Romanticism is a posture, not a policy; it is a view of the world, not a philosophy with which to shape the world. And as it does not work as a philosophy for adults, it works even less well with children. ONE FUNDAMENTAL point remains. Recognizing that there is no small risk in raising the question of religion in a diverse and secular society, I feel that it is an issue that cannot be ignored in the context of education and values. The
The central question is deceptively simple: can man be good without God? No doubt some people can, though I expect their numbers are few. The larger issue is that the great wisdom traditions (as theologian Huston Smith calls them) are the source of moral and ethical life for most citizens of the globe, past and present. Recognizing this truism does not make life easier for schools, but ignoring it makes schooling nearly impossible.

Think, for example, of explaining the civil rights movement without referring to its religious foundations: Martin Luther King was a pastor, his ministry was social justice, and the enemy was the government. The last bears repeating. The enemy was the government. The policeman was not his friend.

Schools that serve a heterogeneous population are properly nonsectarian. But they cannot ignore religion, nor can they ignore the fact that all the great religions seek to better the human lot: they are value-laden. Because schools cannot be value-free, they must at minimum model, exemplify, and reinforce the homespun virtues of democratic capitalism: honesty, forbearance, toleration, respect for self and others, courage, integrity.

In The Aims of Education, written in 1911, Alfred North Whitehead - mathematician, philosopher, teacher -- wrote what is arguably the most compelling essay about education in the history of the genre. He concludes with these words:

The essence of education is that it be religious. Pray, what is religious education? A religious education is an education that inculcates duty and reverence. Duty arises from our potential control over the course of events. Where attainable knowledge could have changed the issue, ignorance has the guilt of vice. And the foundation of reverence is this perception, that the present holds within itself the complete sum of existence, backwards and forwards, that whole amplitude of time, which is eternity. Although one of the first lessons we learn in philosophy is not to judge the message by the messenger, in the case of Rousseau it would be irresponsible to ignore his behavior. He practiced what he preached. His life is metaphor. As he cruelly exploited his weak-minded housekeeper, using her for his sexual pleasure, he blithely consigned their children to foundling homes, asserting that they were better off for being spared the evils of a bourgeois upbringing. In his case, at least, that may have been true. But our children are not better off for being consigned to the education foundling homes that are his legacy.

Finally, as a true conservative, I must conclude in the best liberal tradition. As I do not want to have Rousseau's views imposed on me, I do not propose to force my Hobbesian views on hapless romantics. Let us agree to that. That is what liberty - or liberalism - is supposed to be about. The logic of liberalism is to leave people free to pursue the aims that suit their values. Let the followers of Rousseau and Hobbes compete in the marketplace of both ideas and practice. The schools of Rousseau for those that want
them, the schools of Hobbes for the rest. EC

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