BOOK REVIEW

EDUCATING CITIZENS: PREPARING AMERICA’S UNDERGRADUATES FOR LIVES OF MORAL AND CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

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Most of us who teach ethics at the college level hope that the courses we offer have some impact on our students. At the very least, we wish to enhance their understanding of moral theories. Hopefully, we also promote their capacity to identify and resolve moral problems in their own lives, and to reflect on social problems, such as poverty, racism, war and so on. Ideally, we would like to believe that our students emerge from their college experiences, prepared to live moral lives of critical civic commitment. However, at least with regard to this last hope, we often fail. In an age of poor voter turnout, individualism, moral relativism and indifference to the common good, our hope to produce morally and civically engaged men and women seems unrealized. In the midst of this, Anne Colby, Thomas Ehrlich, Elizabeth Beaumont and Jason Stephens’ helpful book, Educating Citizens: Preparing America’s Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility could not have been timed any better. In ten chapters, through an exploration and analysis of the current attempts to foster the moral and civic development on college campuses, they offer insights and recommendations on how colleges and universities may achieve this goal. This book should be mandatory reading for college administrators, especially those employed at colleges that include moral and civic values in their mission statements.

The authors begin in the first chapter with an interesting story of a Virginia Foster Durr, a friend of the two senior authors of the book, Anne Colby and Thomas Ehrlich. Before passing away in 1999, Mrs. Durr devoted much of her life to causes of racial justice and civil liberties. What makes this especially interesting is that she grew up in an upper class Alabama family, thoroughly entrenched in a racist culture. Nonetheless, she somehow overcame her upbringing to become an important fig-
ure in the civil rights movement. Mrs. Durr found the roots of her transformation in her college years at Wellesley in the early 1920s.

Colby, et. al., argue that the kind of university experience that set the stage for Virginia Durr’s transformation no longer exists. As colleges and universities gradually become large vocational training centers, the type of academic preparation that could produce citizens engaged in social dialogue is becoming an artifact of the past. What is needed, they argue, is a return to a college experience in which moral and civic development is intentional and holistic. That is, colleges and universities must construct the undergraduate experience with the specific intention of fostering moral and civic development, and the means of promoting such development should be woven into all aspects of campus life.

In Chapter Two, the authors discuss a variety of factors that characterize the way in which the college experience has changed, in effect, peripheralizing moral and civic development. They examine the nineteenth century college experience in which moral and civic development was central to a college education. American colleges, often small, religiously-affiliated liberal arts colleges, typically prescribed a uniform liberal arts curriculum with emphasis on language, literature and religion. Neither students nor faculty specialized in the way that now characterizes higher education. Though pedagogy was typically limited to memorization and recitation, the primary objective was moral and civic instruction. However, the authors note that even before Virginia Durr attended college in the 1920s, the college experience had already begun to change, making liberal education, and along with it, the goal of moral and civic responsibility, more difficult to achieve (25). By the early 1900s, a shift toward the German university model that emphasized practical and vocational education, specialization, scholarly research by faculty and academic freedom was already underway (28). Hence, the expectations placed upon faculty began to shift from teaching to conducting scholarly research. Indeed, the authors note that this emphasis has since spread from research universities to master’s level universities to strictly undergraduate universities (ibid). Additionally, the curriculum changed from a general and uniform liberal arts curriculum to a specialized course of study that allowed student to select an intense, highly focused concentration.

The authors also cite loss of a sense of community as another reason for the demise of moral and civic development in higher education. The small residential colleges of the 19th century have become less common than large public universities in which a sense of community is diffi-
cult to establish. Other factors weaken the sense of community on college campuses. For instance, many colleges and universities, especially community colleges and urban universities are non-residential. Not residing on campus can make it difficult to feel a sense of community with one's professors and fellow undergraduates.

Most of the remaining chapters describe and, to some extent, assess the initiatives of twelve colleges and universities to promote the moral and civic development of their undergraduates: Alverno College (a small Catholic women's college in Milwaukee, Wisconsin); California State University, Monterey Bay (a small residential university in the Cal State system); the College of St. Catherine (“St. Kate’s”) is the largest Catholic women's college in the country, with campuses in both St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota); Duke University (a medium-sized prestigious research institution in Durham, North Carolina); Kapi'olani Community College (an ethnically diverse community college located in Honolulu, Hawaii); Messiah College (a small conservative residential Christian college in rural Western Pennsylvania); Portland State University (a large nonresidential urban public university in Portland, Oregon); Spellman College (a small historically Black women's college in Atlanta, Georgia); Turtle Mountain Community College (a small community college located on a Chippewa reservation in North Dakota); Tusculum College (a small liberal arts college in Tennessee); the United States Air Force Academy (a military academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado); and the University of Notre Dame (a large Catholic research institution in South Bend, Indiana).

While all of these schools have developed noteworthy programs, they vary in their approaches. Alverno, Tusculum and Duke tend to emphasize the achievement of moral and civic competencies (53). With this outcomes-based approach, the idea is to structure curricula and other elements of the college experience such that they promote mastery over certain competencies. For instance, students at Alverno College must demonstrate mastery in skill categories such as “Valuing in Decision-Making, Social Interaction, Global Perspective and Effective Citizenship.”

In contrast, Portland State, Spellman, and Kapi’olani illustrate what the authors refer to as the “Community Connections Approach” (56). This method promotes moral and civic growth by building community service and connectedness into curricular and extracurricular requirements. For instance, Portland State’s “University Studies” requires various forms of
civic involvement from all students each academic year, freshman year through senior capstone. Freshman year goals are as follows:

1. The student will understand individual and collective choices in society, e.g., through awareness of political and social phenomena.
2. The student will become aware of the consequences of his or her actions on others.
3. The student will realize the value and importance of service in the community.
4. The student will develop connections with faculty, the university community, and the surrounding metropolitan area. (58)

The Air Force Academy, Turtle Mountain Community College and Messiah College represent a third method, the “Moral and Civic Virtue Approach” (61). Unlike the previous approach, the moral and civic virtue approach does not emphasize community involvement, but rather personal virtues. The U.S. Air Force Academy offers the clearest illustration. The Academy’s Center for Character Development provides programs in which all cadets must participate. Among the virtues included in the character-development outcomes are forthright integrity, selflessness, decisiveness, responsibility, self-discipline, courage and appreciation of spirituality (62). Fostering these virtues supports the academy’s strict honor code: *We will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor tolerate anyone who does* (62).

Finally, California State Monterey Bay, Notre Dame and the College of St. Catherine have developed a “Social Justice Approach” (65). A large residential university, the University of Notre Dame goes beyond the classroom in its effort to engender a commitment to social justice by utilizing its residence hall leaders to develop programs and discussion around themes such as poverty and oppression. Indeed, at graduation, many Notre Dame students wear green ribbons signifying that they have taken a pledge “to investigate and take into account the social and environmental consequences of any job they consider, thereby striving to create a just, peaceful, and nonviolent world” (68).

Despite the fact that Colby, et al., separate out various distinct approaches to moral and civic development, they argue that all such programs should have elements of each. However, the authors take care to show that in order to make moral and civic development an integral component of college life, ongoing commitment is needed among leadership. One key point of commonality among all the twelve colleges studied was
the determination of the college presidents to promote the moral/civic growth of undergraduates. For example, Colby, et. al., discuss the commitment of Gerald “Carty” Monette, president of Turtle Mountain Community College since 1978. Monette’s continual insistence that the Chippewa culture be reflected in and reinforced by the college curriculum has been a unifying force at the college since its inception in 1972.

While college presidents play an undeniable role in the development and maintenance of programs that promote moral and civic development, the authors point out that other sources of leadership exist on campus. Not surprisingly, faculty turn out to play a key role. Colby, et al., give specific examples of faculty leadership, such as that of Robert Franco, a professor of anthropology at Kapi’olani Community College. As the co-coordinator of KCC’s service-learning program, Prof. Franco has teamed up with other academic leadership to place service-learning at the core of the college’s pedagogical philosophy.

Finally, campus culture represents another essential component of effective moral and civic development. Colby, et al., argue that classroom work intended to foster moral/civic development has minimal impact when campus culture (i.e., its rituals, practices and socialization strategies) does not reinforce this goal. Hence, it is essential that campus leadership maintain a campus culture that supports the moral and civic goals of the institution.

In Chapter 4, the authors examine various aspects of moral judgment and moral development as they relate to our topic. They identify three relevant clusters of capacities, one related to moral and civic understanding, another related to moral and civic motivation and a third related to effective practice. A number of interesting points emerge from this discussion, especially those related to motivation. Colby, et al., point to research that shows that college can have a significant affect on moral and civic motivation, especially in connection with service learning (114). Indeed, the authors point to numerous studies that suggest that participation in pro-social activities, such as service learning, in college can transform students’ moral goals and values (115). Such transformative experiences are most powerful when they connect with beliefs, commitments and concerns that the students already possess, such as a concern for the elderly or a connection with children (116).

The authors also discuss the centrality of students’ moral and civic identity when colleges are intentionally trying to foster the development of certain values. Moral motivation is strongest when it relates to values that are closest to a student’s self-concept. Moreover, as a result of expo-
sure to role models and possible career paths, self-concept develops significantly during the college years (121). This provides a rich opportunity to affect moral and civic development that will last.

With regard to civic motivation, Colby, et al., discuss the importance of both creating a sense of “political efficacy” and engendering a kind of playfulness and appreciation of politics as a game of sorts (122). With specific reference to political efficacy, the authors note that many students entering college feel that civic involvement is futile, that positive change cannot be made. Hence, to the extent that students, through activities such as community service or service learning, can begin to experience a sense of political efficacy, they are far more likely to emerge from college with a greater sense of moral and civic commitment.

Chapter 5 continues to offer pedagogical strategies for educating citizens. Colby, et al., begin by pointing out what they take to be the limits of traditional, lecture-based pedagogies. If our hope is for students to gain a deep understanding that can be applied outside the classroom, lecture-based teaching styles are ineffective, or at least limited. Instead, the authors advocate what have been called pedagogies of engagement (134). So-called because they engage students in the learning process, pedagogies of engagement may take various forms. Among the most popular are service learning, problem-based learning and collaborative learning. Research in education shows that these pedagogies tend to lead to deeper comprehension and transferable knowledge than does listening to lectures and taking notes.

Another highlight of this chapter is the treatment of teaching ethics, especially in connection with the kind of relativism that is commonly embraced among undergraduates. The authors suggest that the way in which ethics is often taught, surveying and critiquing various moral theories, is partly responsible for the widespread relativism across college campuses. This kind of relativism seems to correlate with another common phenomenon among college students, a discomfort with and/or an inability to move beyond moral disagreement. Hence, Colby, et al., suggest that ethics courses (and others courses with an ethics component) should strive to foster skills of moral discourse, such as acknowledging points of agreement, diagnosing sources of disagreement, giving explicit reasons to justify one’s assertions and avoiding simple dichotomies (145). Finally, the chapter concludes with informative and useful descriptions of special courses and teaching techniques from a handful of professors from various colleges across the country (not restricted to the twelve colleges listed above).
The remainder of the book explores ways of integrating moral and civic learning into the various elements of college life. In particular, Chapter 6 discusses methods of weaving moral and civic development into the curriculum. The authors begin by pointing to barriers to the kind of integration they are advocating. Specifically, colleges and universities are divided up into academic departments with very little cross-disciplinary opportunities for undergraduates. Because moral and civic learning draws from many disciplines (e.g., political science, philosophy, sociology and so on), this kind of disciplinary isolation makes it difficult to infuse moral and civic learning into the curriculum.

In discussing different points of entry for the integration of moral and civic learning, Colby, et al., examine one of the most obvious places, general education courses. All colleges and universities have some version of general education requirements. The authors are critical of the distribution requirement approach. According to this approach, students select courses from among a range of alternatives in which a variety of disciplines are represented. However, one major shortcoming of this approach is that students often select courses because they fit their schedules or because their friends are taking the course. The result is often a hodgepodge with no overall focus or integration.

Instead of distribution requirements, Colby, et al., endorse an outcomes-based, core curriculum approach which gives colleges greater control over the kinds of courses to which students are exposed, allowing colleges to create a sequence of courses that overlap and complement one another. A core curriculum made up of courses oriented towards relevant outcomes can be deliberately constructed to expose students to ideas (e.g., theories of distributive justice) and activities (e.g., community service and/or service learning) connected to moral and civic development.

While a well constructed, outcomes-based core curriculum is a powerful tool, the authors underscore the extent to which courses within a student’s major may also promote moral and civic growth. They note that the American Political Science Association has urged political science professors to integrate more civic education into their teaching and research. Similarly, the American Psychological Association recommends more extensive use of service learning (186).

The authors also propose ways and offer suggestions of weaving moral and civic learning into other academic disciplines. For instance, science students at California State University, Monterey Bay, can choose from a variety of courses, such as “Water and Humanity,” that contain
moral and civic elements (190-91). In a similar vein, in response to the large Hmong, Somali and Ethiopian populations in the St. Paul area, health care related majors at College of St. Catherine have courses that explore the values of these cultures and the moral challenges they present in clinical contexts (193-94).

After discussing the specifically curricular requirements for moral and civic learning and development, the authors go on in Chapter 7 to discuss the role and needs of faculty. One obvious point quickly emerges, and that is that there are currently a whole host of factors working against faculty who try to promote moral and civic development. First, in many research universities, tenure and promotion is attached to research, not teaching. Time spent perfecting one’s teaching only takes away from time that could be spent researching. The extra time it takes to develop activities that promote moral and civic development is often not rewarded. Consider for example, how time-intensive service learning can be for a professor. Even if there is a service learning coordinator who handles much of the logistical detail, it still creates a lot of extra work for the professor. If faculty are not rewarded for their efforts, it is unfair to expect them to try to pull together readings and develop modules that foster moral and civic development.

The authors argue that in order for moral and civic development to be a priority for the faculty, administration must be supportive and faculty must be rewarded for it (even if that reward is simply informal recognition for a job well done). Administrative support is needed in order to train faculty and provide logistic assistance for curricular development. Moreover, colleges and universities must be willing to allocate resources to encourage and support faculty in their efforts to devote time and energy to the development of courses and activities that promote moral/civic commitment.

One of the most interesting chapters of the book is Chapter 8, “Moral and Civic Learning Beyond the Classroom,” which explores ways of promoting moral and civic development through extracurricular activities. First, the authors note that studies show that there is a strong correlation between involvement in extracurricular activity and satisfaction with college life. Moreover, the only reliable indicator of adult success is involvement in extracurricular activities during one’s college years. Nonetheless, Colby, et al., admit that there may be factors that work against efforts to infuse moral/civic learning into the extracurricular life of college students. Indeed, the very way in which colleges are divided up into academic affairs, on the one hand, and student life on the other, turns out
to be a barrier to the integration of moral/civic learning. That is, academic administration and faculty often do not see extracurricular activity as their responsibility, but rather assume that it is solely the responsibility of student life.

The authors also discuss the way in which undergraduates should be approached in connection with extracurricular activities that are intended to promote moral and civic learning. They emphasize that students learn more and remain engaged in activities they have freely chosen. Hence, providing a variety of activities from which students may choose (or not choose) is important. Forcing them to be involved will not make them engaged and interested (221).

Colby, et al., then set forth what they take to be “hallmarks of quality” for extracurricular activities that support moral/civic learning (222). They propose that extracurricular programs should be:

1. Intentionally designed to produce certain learning outcomes,
2. Aligned with the mission of the campus so that curricular and extracurricular activities reinforce one another,
3. Guided by both student affairs and faculty,
4. Regularly assessed.

The authors go on to discuss some examples of these hallmarks. One useful setting for moral and civic learning is the residence hall. The University of Notre Dame utilizes its residence halls exceptionally well to create community (students usually remain in the same residence hall for all four years). Moreover, each with their own service commissioner, residence halls at Notre Dame are very active in service to the campus and the surrounding community, especially the women’s dorms (239).

In addition to activities through the residence halls, some colleges are able to make use of campus political clubs and organizations. For instance, members of George Washington University’s chapter of College Democrats of America volunteer to help out with campaigns and voter drives (247). Similarly, within the past fifteen years, campus religious organizations have not only become more and more prevalent, but also more and more active in social issues. Like campus political clubs and societies, religious organizations on campus also provide excellent opportunities for moral and civic growth, provided that they reflect the hallmarks of quality mentioned above (248-9).

Colby, et al., also report that some campuses create ongoing forums or campus conversations in order to capture teachable moments for moral and civic learning. College of St. Catherine, for instance, sponsors
community meetings (often organized by students) in which faculty, staff and students may gather to discuss issues that affect any aspect of the campus community. One interesting example of such a community meeting at St. Kate’s followed a public chastisement by the local bishop when an invited speaker made remarks in favor of abortion rights. This episode prompted a campus-wide discussion on the meaning of Catholic identity (237).

Chapter 9 on “Assessment and Civic Education” examines the extent to which moral and civic development can be measured. Colby, et al., acknowledge that courses and programs intended to foster moral and civic development are rarely assessed. Nonetheless, they offer some suggestions on methods of assessment. One possibility offered involved a visiting committee (of “critical friends”) to examine a program’s goals, strategies and products. However, for those who want to go beyond this kind of assessment, Colby, et al., discuss more in-depth methods. The authors distinguish between high-yield and low-yield assessment (268). In assessing programs intended to promote moral and civic learning, the authors endorse a high-yield approach, i.e., an assessment that looks at “the processes through which the program operates, the nature of students’ experiences, the changes (they) undergo” along with relevant outcomes. They contrast this method with low-yield assessment, which focuses exclusively on outcomes.

The authors conclude the book with a reminder of the sense of national unity and identity that followed the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and argue that moral and civic development is needed now more than ever as governments make decisions that have long-lasting world-wide impact.

This book was a joy to read, primarily because of dozens and dozens of examples of moral and civic learning that occur at colleges across the country. For anyone hoping to improve the status of moral and civic learning at their institution, it is always best first to learn from what other institutions are doing. To be sure, Colby, et al., have provided a valuable resource for colleges and universities seeking to promote moral and civic development and have given good reason why schools who do not intentionally promote moral and civic development should do so. This book is a must read for both faculty and administration.