

Fact and Value in Teaching

Using illustrations principally from the teaching of American government and politics, the author lists five common ways in which the objective and moral worlds are dealt with. The systematic presentation of general factual statements, supplemented by methodological and action training, is the preferred mode of instruction. University authorities should provide a general moral program, rather than relegating the burden to political scientists.

Education is a communication, a transaction that comments on the "objective world" and connotes or denotes a moral. A question that faces every reflective instructor in political science or another social science is: How should the objective world and the moral world affect the communication of my subject?

The practical answers to this question can be observed in the following procedures, which take courses in American national government for purposes of illustration.

(a) Only facts of a relatively low order of generalization, grouped around institutions such as the Constitution, the judiciary, the presidency, the political party, etc., are taught students. Students are made to be so busy learning facts that they do not query the meaningfulness of their activity.

(b) Assertedly "non - controversial values" are injected into teaching, such as, "The government ought to be well administered," "The cities ought to be fairly represented in State legislatures,"

and of correct political practice are two methods that are greatly beneficial, when controlled, and should be incorporated *into every course* in political science. They are essential tools of the operating political scientist and citizen, and greatly promote the assimilation of materials presented in a systematic, general, factual manner. The only reservations are that they should not remove the course from the integrity and scope of its materials, from the control of the professor, and from the dispassionate approach that students are supposed to imitate.

In general, therefore, there are important reasons for preferring the method of general, contemplative, factual statements to other modes of conducting courses in social science, including American national government. It is assumed that no one will say that this method is antithetical to moral teachings or that it will produce amoral students. Neither is true, and to insure that neither is believed true, an additional recommendation is to be made.

American educational institutions, with some notable exceptions among denominational schools, run without moral direction. Probably the main reason for this anarchy of morals rests in our fear that another kind of morality may take precedence over our own. Hence we tend to justify the hubbub of insignificant activity and the resulting moral indifference of our educated population on grounds that they reveal the essential strength of our many-sided morality and democracy: everyone believes what he wishes and that is good. But by origin and temperament, university presidents are increasingly administrators, who appear to be conducting a circus for its own sake, or public relations men, whose goal seems to be to help outsiders to enjoy the circus. Such a morality is scarcely to be applauded; educational institutions ought to be as morally guided as governmental institutions. Differences

in governance in school and state ought to result principally from the differences in mean age of their inmates.

University presidents and trustees cannot avoid responsibility for neglect of morals; neither can they expect political scientists to convert their classrooms into churches to fill the gap. Most of the moral problems of life are not political in the professional sense of the term. Biology, chemistry, physics, physical education, English composition, and, in fact, every discipline in the college, has as much or as little to do with morals as political science. There is no more reason to ask a professor to pour out his hatred of racial discrimination in a political science class than there is to ask his colleague in an astronomy class to describe at length his great love for the God that inhabits the heavens.

Such responsibilities should be centrally organized as the responsibility of the university community. If there are good things about American government, the board of trustees or president should expound them at length and at will to the students in the proper places at the proper time. Chapels, student associations, and the many other fora for such moral instruction should be rescued from what is often degenerate triviality. Some universities may ask their faculty to give some fraction of their time to moral exposition in the context of their courses. And the exposition of moral views ought not to be limited to politics. Sex relations, family relations, religion, and business ought to share a school's evangelical energies. These methods of reconciling American institutions to the diversity of American moral codes is preferable, in the opinion of the author, to each college being all things to all men but nothing of importance to any one.

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Yet, I *am* interested in the problem, so I systematically delineate the conditions that produce decentralized or nationalized parties and describe the effects of each mode of party organization.)

(b) It relates to other people's values and will put them in better control of their values. (Suppose that I am not at all interested in this question, but I see that my audience wishes stronger national parties; so I go through the same process as in [a].)

(c) It relates to a consensus of concern among people who are in conflict. This fact is deemed important to all of them. (Suppose that I observe a great conflict on this question of nationalizing parties; I therefore go through the same systematizing and generalizing process on grounds that each participant in the controversy will derive what he needs from the discussion.)

(d) It relates to existing facts that have been built into a "field of science" because they have been related to (a), (b), or (c), above. In this case, its selection can be indirectly attributed to (a), (b), or (c), which thus can be kept as the models that exhaust the reasons for the selection of facts. (Suppose that neither I nor many others have any interest in this problem, but that "decentralization" and "centralization" are key concepts in the study of government administration; thus I bring them into the field of political parties in order better to understand the concepts as they operate in spheres other than government administration.)

These categories and the extended example show the ways in which factual statements originate from values; they also may partially reveal how values do or do not influence pedagogy.

In this sense of objectivity, the teacher takes it upon himself to reject temporarily his own values, to select factual generalizations as his aim, to satisfy warring social elements, and to contribute to a striking social phenomenon: the development of an integrated and systematic body of political science. Indeed,

to diverge from the main argument for a moment, the leading concepts of any science are, in a sense, the residues from the social process whereby value-judgments are reduced, modified, subjected to a new logic, and given a lease on life in a strange environment where other reformed convicts dwell.

It is thus maintained, on the basis of the analysis, that the systematic presentation of general factual statements is significantly different from the statement of value-judgments. And, furthermore, it is suggested that the nature of these differences arbitrates against the value-judgment practice and on behalf of the organization of teaching around general factual statements. The following is a résumé of the reasons for this belief:

(a) The professor controls students' attention according to professional (*i.e.*, conventional "scientific") standards and, at the same time, fosters the development of such standards.

(b) There is a consensus, professionally defined, as to the importance of matters under discussion.

(c) Loose talk, and time-consuming and emotional debate, are avoided.

(d) The analysis of direct and indirect consequences of events is built into the pedagogical process, for scientific inquiry requires a full awareness of consequences in discussing events.

(e) The students are given an opportunity to reformulate their position on neutral ground, rather than being required to accept or reject an opposing position. This procedure allows them to return to their previous value-judgment or to form or accept a new value-judgment. (Often, too, professors have been so proud of the few students they have aroused to activity by their exhortations of values that they overlook other students who have been reduced to resentful or cloddish apathy.)

It is asserted that this method should be the fundamental one; it should be amended to a certain extent, however. The teaching of correct political logic

second value-judgment emerges from the fact that what is learned may be used *against* one as well as *for* one. One elects to arm his enemies. That is, teaching students how to do what they want in politics, without previously indoctrinating them about what they ought to do, sets up a risk that they will not do what one wants. (In fact, however, the classroom at the college level is not a very effective propaganda vehicle. If we were more modest, several generations of observing the dissimilar voting behaviors of alumni and faculties would convince us of this point.)

The third value-judgment, or realm of many such judgments, lies in the selection of concepts to teach and of tactics to prescribe. For example, should one devote his time in class to teaching students the principles of gaining office in the government of the United States *via* elections, or of influencing politicians with cash and otherwise, or of subverting the government? Obviously, there is a range of morality, into which different objective tactics fit with different utilities. To clarify by impractical hypothesis, one way around this dilemma would be individual instruction: each student would be asked initially to clarify his political goals, and instruction would be designed to assist his attainment of those goals. At 8:00 A.M., one would teach a student who is to be a businessman how to tell whether or not a "five-per-center," who in effect promises favorable government action on a contingent commission, has influence; at 9:00 A.M., a communist how to demoralize the Department of State; at 10:00 A.M., a fascist how to demoralize the State department; and at 11:00 A.M., a future foreign service officer how to administer the State department "well." In doing so, one would be practicing essentially the form of pedagogy used in the natural sciences, and indeed following a pattern that is a substantial part of all education. We would fit a person for *his* life, not our life. It is partly because of the frequent joining of "non-controversial"

morals with the action approach that incidents such as the following are not more common:

The University of Maryland came under fire yesterday for its plans to sponsor a discussion next week on "legitimate ways to resist a union drive" at its 11th annual Office Management Conference.

J. C. Turner, president of the Greater Washington Central Labor Council, sent telegrams of protest to University officials and Gov. J. Millard Tawes. Complaints were also received from unidentified Maryland Legislators.

"We protest most vehemently the use of facilities of the University of Maryland for the purpose of defeating the legitimate objectives of free trade unions in this country," Turner said.¹

The practice of turning students loose in all kinds of political organizations so that they may learn from within is only another way of doing the same thing; without having said so in so many words, one guides the student to find his own milieu in politics. "Are you interested in cooperatives? Then visit one and follow its activities. Let me have a paper on it before the semester ends."

It appears that certain kinds of value-free teaching of a "know-how" type can easily get out of hand. One should approach value-free teaching with different principles for settling on the materials to be taught.

The contemplative (rather than action) mode of teaching, which is involved in the idea of teaching general factual principles, needs to be looked at more closely. The statement of factual principles is in one sense a sophisticated avoidance of value-judgments: one is telling people what *is*, rather than what *ought* to be. But such is not the true meaning of a factual statement, for any factual statement is a selection, from infinite phenomena, of one condition or series of events on one of the following grounds:

(a) It relates to one of my values and will put me in better control of my values. (To illustrate: I may not wish to tell people that I like the probable effects of nationalizing the decentralized American national political parties. That would be unjust to my listeners, I feel.

¹ *Washington Post*, October 23, 1959, p. 38.

"A political party ought to stand for clear principles," or, "A citizen ought to be staunchly active in the affairs of his government."

(c) Facts of a high (as well as low) order of generality are used to avoid value-judgments and at the same time maximize the utility of the instruction for later life. Examples would be the use of such concepts as "oligarchy" in the study of parties, "apathy *vs.* involvement" in the study of citizen participation of leadership, or "interests" in the study of parties. Students are taught *about* values, as well as facts, but are not indoctrinated with values.

(d) "Process of thinking" is emphasized so that the student is not told what to think but rather how to think. He is shown how to work his way through the broad and deep stream of information on political subjects. He learns techniques of library reference, of simple content analysis, of detecting political fallacies of a logical character, or of observing the changing character of institutions and politics.

(e) "Process of acting" is emphasized. The student is placed in the political process to learn by doing. He is encouraged to join or observe organizations such as parties, pressure groups, mock legislatures, newspapers, and courts, and is not supposed to be told that any one phenomenon is better than any other.

Pedagogy probably has improved to the point where one need not discuss why the teaching of facts of a low level of generalization should be held to a minimum. It conveys no meaning, is easily forgotten, and is conducive to moral apathy.

What is to be said of the "non-controversial value-judgment" approach? Is it to be used or not? It presents a most difficult problem, for several reasons. First, its vapid morality passes easily by the watchful guardians of academic morals in our day. In addition, students like to hear such moral strictures because they do not violate what they have heard before, because they

satisfy the appetite for value-judgments, because the professor is supposed to be a superior moral being, and because the professor of political science is presumed to be an expert on matters of good or bad political morals.

Yet the disadvantages of the method are great because usually these value-judgments are superficial. If one pursues the direct and indirect consequences of any such statement of preference, he begins to uncover differences of belief among students and instructors. For example, although the belief that "political parties ought to have clear principles" is serenely accepted by most people, it actually covers up explosive issues in our political life. It is the kind of statement that excites a faint elation, for who can be against "clear principles," but it conceals warring ways of life in the value-structures of individuals. So with the value-judgment that the "government ought to be well administered." By whom? For whom? One can recollect administration which is hateful to the degree that it follows the textual principles of hierarchy, control, and effectiveness. If I were a politician, I should spend a fair share of my time hampering some administrative efforts towards machined perfection. I should also resent the sloganized morals of faculties and their students, since I would regard them as frustrating a "better choice" of official conduct. If some political scientists realized the extent to which they were prey to professional slogans and ideologies, they would not so blithely advise students as to the best administration, the best citizen, the best foreign policy, or the best political party.

Rejecting the preachment of "non-controversial" morality leaves one with practices that are assertedly objective, *i.e.*, the teaching of general factual principles, of correct political thinking, and of techniques of political action. Let it be admitted here and now, however, that these are value-free only in a sense.

The first value-judgment is, of course, to choose these ways of teaching. The