

An Invitation to Participate in the Nation's Values Conversation

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*America **is** involved **in** a serious national discussion of its values and virtues. There is sound evidence that the nation's moral standards are shifting and this alteration has important implications for both the present and the future. Therefore, it is important for all proponents of values to participate skillfully in the ongoing national dialogue. The suggestion is that it **Is** feasible for those participants to begin with a method based on the notion that human behavior is a function of skills, knowledge and attitudes (SKA). Specifically, invitationists can and should promote their values respect, trust, optimism and intentionality) by being prepared to live them, listen to others discuss them and lead others to sources of learning about them.*

Many stimuli compete for our attention and, according to perceptual psychology (Combs, Richards, & Richards, 1988), the thing we notice first in any situation is the one most congruent with our value system. Thus, our values are guidelines for our be-

havior. However, these standards often are so implicit they go unnoticed. It is important periodically to raise our level of awareness of our value system and to examine its contents. In fact, the nation is currently involved in that critical process and in a democracy like America, it is incumbent upon all citizens to join that effort. This is an invitation to all invitationists to do so effectively.

Why Is There A National Conversation about Values?

Today's national values conversation has evolved from an historical background. Several writers (Himmelfarb, 1995; Pelligrino & Thomasma, 1993; and Bloom, 1987) contend that Western Civilization's moral standards can be traced to the Classical Greeks of 400 BC who held there were four ascendant virtues: courage, justice, temperance and wisdom. The preeminence of those virtues continued until Greek Civilization collided with the Roman Civilization which brought with it Christian virtues: faith, hope and love. As the Romans prevailed so did their virtues and, for two millennia, faith, hope and love remained relatively unchallenged as the prime virtues of Western Civilization.

The Renaissance and the Enlightenment generated an interest in science (Elkind, 1997) which challenged the church's control over intellectual matters and during the 1880s the drive toward freedom from religious domination was expressed eloquently by Friedrich Nietzsche who declared "God is dead." As a part of his relativistic position, Nietzsche posed the notion of "values" as counterparts to virtues. Nietzsche contended that virtues were moral criteria imposed by religion while values were benchmarks selected by individuals who had looked over the "abyss" and chosen their own moral guidelines. Thus, a cleavage developed between advocates of values and proponents of virtues. Values represented the relativistic position while virtues were products of absolutist thinking.

During the next half century the supporters of a relativistic notion of values and those espousing the absolutist idea of virtues

conducted a dialectic which polarized those groups. In America, most of the activity involved only the academic community until relativism was applied to educational settings by theoreticians such as John Dewey (Elkind, 1997). American schools, which to a large degree were founded to transmit traditional Christian values, were then challenged by the notion of incorporating relativistic thinking.

World War II postponed much of the struggle between absolutism and relativism, but when the war was over the contention resumed and relativism made significant inroads into the society. In the 1960s, relativistic thinking led to a generational and civil rights challenge to the old establishment which was controlled primarily by white male absolutists.

Elkind (1997) discussed education's shift from modernism (scientific absolutism) to post modernism (relativism):
Although the postmodern movement began growing a century or so ago, it only came into prominence after the middle of this century. With regard to education, many postmodern ideas were introduced by educators such as Maria Montessori and Jean Piaget who wrote and worked in the modern era. But it was only in the 1960s and '70s that the tenets of post modernism-difference, particularity, and irregularity-began to dictate educational practice. (p.34)

Elkind (1997) listed several specific factors that were ushered in by the postmodern era: permeable families, shared parenting, autonomy as a prime value, the attitude of children as competent, the attitude of adolescents as sophisticated, parenting as technique, teaching as an acquisition of certain knowledge and skills, and the mixture of styles and patterns from different historical periods. In Elkind's view, all of these postmodern innovations impacted education and changed it significantly. The clear implication is that the postmodern era had similar effects on every segment of the culture.

Radical relativists contended that values had to be evaluated in the context of their native culture and, as such, all were equally valid. This style of thinking was abetted by the 1954 Supreme Court decision in the Brown versus the Board of Education litigation which invalidated the "separate but equal" doctrine drawn from the Plessey versus Ferguson case. Essentially, the decision held that separate was inherently unequal. Thus, the legal barriers to an implementation of relativistic thinking were removed.

In this new legal climate, relativists became socially active and adopted pluralistic-based strategies (multiculturalism) to challenge society's segregated institutions. At that point, the thinking of relativists had three major components: First, the values and virtues of all cultures are equal (relativism); second, all cultures deserve equal respect (pluralism); and third, all cultures deserve equal representation in society (multiculturalism).

The relativistic philosophy generated considerable social action during which values and virtues became an undifferentiated mass. Dialogue about values and virtues became so imprecise that serious, systematic investigations of them were pretty much abandoned. The discussion remained at the generic level in which rhetoric was the principal device.

Meanwhile, a cacophony of events such as the Viet Nam War, Watergate, assassinations, drug abuse, teenage pregnancies, crime, campaign finance fraud, etc., led to a general understanding that something was fundamentally amiss in society. Many writers pointed to values as the source of the core problem, but the prevailing imprecision mitigated against systematic investigations that could illuminate the topic.

The attraction of values problems created a commercial market that invited charlatans who would say almost anything to give notice to the subject. They invaded the religious and political communities and the popular media published articles whose main function was to sell products. William Bennett (1993), businessman/politician, produced a bestseller which earned him millions from what essentially was a lightly edited, but well publicized

compilation of classic literature. Elsewhere, his data verified the reality of a values deficit, but he did not offer a viable solution. Not so coincidentally, he accumulated a fortune describing the crisis colorfully.

Citizens continued to express concern about America's values crisis and an extensive body of primarily non-technical literature was generated. Quality books on the topic include *Savage In-equalities* (1991) by Jonathan Kozol; *The Virtues in Medical Practice* (1993) by Edmund Pellegrino and David Thomasma; *The Moral Sense* (1993) by James Q. Wilson; *The Moral Collapse of the University* (1990) by Bruce Wilshire; *Thomas Hobbes and the Science of Moral Virtue* (1994) by David Boonin-vail; *The Spiritual Lfē of Children* (1990) by Robert Coles; *The Moral Dimensions of Teaching* (1990) by John Goodlad, K. Soder and K. Sirotnik; *The De-moralization of Society* (1995) by Gertrude Himmelfarb, and *Values Matter Most* (1995) by Ben Wattenberg.

These and hundreds of articles, in both professional and nonprofessional literature, continue both to express and fuel the ongoing national values conversation. Finally, in the last half of the 1990s, there is a persistent call for increased precision in the field.

In brief, the national values conversation currently has three major types of activist participants: commercializers, unfocused zealots and serious investigators. The commercializers are pointing out the problems and describing them in all their gory details. Unfocused zealots are making a lot of noise that is being diffused into a cloud of impotent indignation. Serious investigators are devising theoretical models to use while sorting through the plethora of data to discern patterns that will illuminate the problems as well as their possible solutions. Clearly, the need is for more involvement by the third group.

What Is Being Said in the Current National Values Conversation?

One of the most informative books about the study of values is *Values and Public Policy* (1994) published by the Brookings Institution, a progressive and prestigious Washington think tank. The editors, Henry Aaron, Thomas Mann and Timothy Taylor stated three propositions about values:

1. Policy analysts take values as givens while ordinary citizens treat them as objects to be changed if problems are to be solved.
2. Values or tastes are hard to quantify independent of the behaviors they engender.
3. The intellectual resources devoted to exploring the formation of tastes (values) in the policy-focused disciplines have been negligible (p.2).

For Aaron, Mann and Taylor (1994), the bottom line is that among academics, "The discussion of tastes (values) have been the province largely of those not in the intellectual vanguard" (p.3).

In the "trenches" where most people live, the story is quite different. When Yankelovich (Aaron, Mann, & Taylor, 1994), one of the nation's premier pollsters, queried non-academics, he found significant activity on the values front. Specifically, he identified two major types of values: changers and non-changers. The non-changers included freedom, equality, fairness, achievement, patriotism, democracy, American exceptionalism, caring, religion and luck. Among the changers were greater tolerance and acceptance of pluralism, marriage and family, meaning of success, work and leisure, social morality, role of government, beating the system, sexual morality, health, and sacredness of life (p.29-50).

Kenneth Woodward (1994) stated:

In the United States, this outlook (relativism) has produced a strong emphasis on rights over responsibilities, and it influences much of contemporary political theory.. all of the core institutions that once transmitted moral education are in disrepair. The family is fractured:

neighborhoods have disappeared or turned surly; many schools can barely educate, and even many churches wonder what to teach.... For the ordinary citizen virtue is easily confused with values... many Americans are unprepared to recognize any moral authority outside themselves... (pp.38-39)
All in all, this pessimistic view of the current morals situation is consistent with a preponderance of the literature.

Toward Precision

Imprecision in the values discussion can be attributed at least partially to activity during the 1950s and '60s which equated values and virtues. At that time, definitions became so fuzzy that, among the general population, values and virtues were the same. Both related to morality. Fortunately, professional workers have compiled an extensive literature directed toward clarifying the values domain.

Rollo May (1953) wrote, "The human being not only can make choices of values and goals, but he is the animal who must do so if he is to attain integration. For the value---the goal he moves toward--serves him as a psychological center... (p.175).

Gordon Allport (1955) stated, "The healthy adult develops under the influence of value schemata whose fulfillment he regards as desirable even though it may never be completely attained" (p. 75). Dan Prescott (1957) said, "Values are more than wishes or desires; they are convictions" (p.412).

Abraham Maslow (1968) stated, "Under really free choice we find mature or healthier people valuing not only truth, goodness and beauty but also the regressive, survival and/or homeostatic values of peace and quiet, of sleep and rest, of surrender, of dependency, and safety, or protection from reality and relief from it, of slipping back from Shakespeare to detective stories, of retiring into fantasy, even of wishing for death" (p.172).

Dugald Arbuckle (1970) stated, "Cultural values may contradict real experienced values, and thus the individual is thrown into conflict" (p 64). In that same year, Charles Reich (1970) wrote, "The values we describe (respect for the natural environment, respect for beauty, respect for individuals, honesty, equality and democracy) must be accepted democratically by a whole people... what matters is the concept: the Corporate state tramples all values and ignores all laws" (p.385).

Viktor Frankl (1975) wrote, "Three groups of values may be derived-creative, experiential, and attitudinal-It is through attitudinal values that even the negative, tragic aspects of human existence, or what I call the 'tragic triad'-pain, guilt and death-may be turned into something positive and creative" (p.125).

Carl Rogers (1983) spoke of three kinds of values: Operative, conceived and objective. He said, "What I have to say involves this last definition scarcely at all" (p.257). Robert Carkhuff (1984) stated, "Values are simply intentions the processor (person) is seeking to fulfill or satisfi"" (p.58).

In 1987, Bloom (1987) stated, "Values, the tables of good and evil that originate in the self cannot be said to be true or false... they are not equal... authentic values are those by which a life can be lived, which can form a people that produces great deeds and thoughts... a value is only a value if it is life-preserving and life-enhancing since values are not rational and not grounded in the natures of those subject to them, they must be imposed" (pp.200-201).

Arthur Combs, Anne Richards, and Fred Richards (1988) defined values as, " .. frames of reference . . which are more or less clearly differentiated in the perceptual field and serve as guides for seeking or avoiding" (p.134).

Tom Lickona (1991) described two kinds of values: moral and nonmoral. He wrote, "Moral values tell us what we ought to do. We must abide by them even when we'd rather not... Nonmoral values carry no such obligation. They express what we want or like to

do"(p. 38). Lickona (1991) divided moral values into universals and nonuniversals holding that universals, "...bind all persons everywhere because they affirm our fundamental human worth and dignity while nonuniversals do not carry a universal moral obligation" (pp.38-39)

Speaking from a medical perspective, Pellegrino and Thomasma (1993) contended, "Values enter the (treatment) process when the factual data are used as a basis for choice between alternative treatments" (p.74).

Gertrude Himmeffarb (1995) wrote, "Values, as we now understand that word, do not have to be virtues; they can be beliefs, opinions, attitudes, feelings. habits, conventions, preferences, prejudices, even idiosyncrasies whatever any individual, group, or society happens to value, at any time, for any reason" (pp.11-12).

Ben Wattenberg (1995) addressed the role of values in political campaigns. He said, "In general, however, in this narrow political campaign sense, it might be said that the values issues are what are left over after economics and foreign policy have been taken off the table" (p.15).

The diversity of these stances leaves the reader with a predisposition to agree with Aaron, Mann and Taylor (1994) when they wrote, "Little wonder that social scientists have tried to steer clear of values arguments. ...After all, values emerge from lessons taught by family, friends and community.. Though values-based explanations of various kinds of behavior remain distressingly fuzzy, there are good analytical reasons for paying attention to them" (p.3).

Amidst the rich but divergent mass of information about values it is reasonable to pay particular attention to the type of definitions proposed by Woodward (1994) who wrote, "Value is a morally neutral term that merely indicates a preference and can be quite banal while 'virtue' Is a quality of character by which individuals habitually recognize and do the right thing" (p.38).

most certainly, research will be improved by separating values from virtues as a first step toward clarifying this promising but blurred area.

Our recommendation is that values be used to identify goals that individuals and groups want to achieve such as getting an education, buying a house and getting married while virtues are used to designate traits that individuals and groups want to cultivate. Perhaps it is better to say that *values are things people want to do while virtues are ways people want to be*. In both cases, these factors serve as guidelines for choices. For instance, two major questions for America are 'what does it want to do' and 'what kind of people does it want to encourage'⁹

A second aspect of precision involves a process akin to a factor analysis of the ongoing proliferation of values and virtues. William Bennett (1993) listed ten virtues: Self discipline, compassion, responsibility, friendship, work, courage, perseverance, honesty, loyalty, and faith. Ben Wattenberg presented 44 values and said of them, "It is much less than a complete list" (p.16). Yankelovich (Aaron, Mann, & Taylor, 1994) stated 16 changing values as well as 11 nonchanging values. Clearly, there is an overabundance of values to be considered by Americans.

The plethora of values is only a part of America's storehouse of plenty. Toffler (1970) cautioned that too many choices can lead to a pathology called 'overchoice.' This difficulty can be illustrated by the situation in the automobile industry where during the 1940s and '50s three brands (Chrysler, Ford, and Chevrolet) dominated. Thus, people were enthusiastic advocates of one of those three brands. Now, there are innumerable types of cars and people are nearly overwhelmed by the process of choosing between so many alternatives.

Values pose a unique task. They require commitments if they are to be functional. That is, one cannot be moderately committed to things like honesty and responsibility. These standards must be taken seriously in order to do their job. However, the American culture now offers a vast and undifferentiated array of "good"

things to be and do. The result seems to be that none of the traits are being taken seriously. For example, honesty and success, two goods, often run counter to each other such as they did in the 1996 elections when it is clear that most contestants gathered funds by either illegal or illicit means. Robert Frank and Philip Cook (1995) described the type of society which is being generated by the obsessional quest for success in an information age climate where everybody wants the "best." Second best, even though of high quality, is unsatisfactory.

The point is this: If our values and virtues are to have vigor, then there is a need to hone in on a few prepotent ones that embody the most desirable traits and aspirations of humankind. This is not to say that there is only a short list of honorable characteristics for civilized human beings. Surely, there are many of them. But, the reality is that in their daily lives people cannot use every star in the sky for their main reference point. There is a need for a moral North Star or Orion galaxy that orients people constantly. In short, it is imperative to factor analyze our moral choices from among an awesome array of laudable traits.

Our functional reality is that it is impossible to orient oneself in the physical universe by gazing at every star in the sky. Some celestial bodies simply yield more usable information than others. The same is true in a moral universe. This is not an argument against relativism but rather to recognize its functional limitations. Irrational relativism, which considers everything equally acceptable, is as illogical as is an absolutism that is used to restrict everything a tyrant deems unacceptable. That is, somewhere along the continuum between these two extremes lies a sensible point at which one finds both reasonable tolerance and judgment.

A major issue is which reference points do we use? Lickona (1991) suggested two functional tests: First, what if everybody behaved this way and second, what if I behaved this way? Essentially, these are group and individual standards. By using these criteria, it is possible to search through the proliferating range of values and virtues and through democratic processes identify a few values that are preeminent. It is possible, indeed necessary, to

make such value judgments. The suggested goal of the national values dialogue is a limited cluster.

Movement toward more precision in the values discussion involves two major phases. First, the adoption of precise definitions of the basic terms: values and virtues. Second, the narrowing of the range of preeminent values and virtues to a small group that have significance in the citizens' daily lives. In short, there is a need to know what values and virtues mean and which ones are serving as the nation's principal moral guidelines.

How to Participate in the National Values Discussion

One of the truly elegant ideas formulated by the human race is that behavior consists of three major components: skills, knowledge and attitudes (SKA). This notion can be debated ad infinitum, but it remains a very convenient format for discussing human activity. At least, as counselors, teachers and athletic coaches we have found this a very functional model for understanding both learning and teaching.

Attitude is a crucial factor for participating in the national values discussion. Why should anyone get excited about values? Dugald Arbuckle (1970) gave some very cogent arguments for being concerned about values:

1. The values of the person *are* the person (p.60).
2. Being one of the homo-sapiens means that one possesses values (p.60).
3. If a person learns he cannot be what he values, he becomes an artificial person (p.63).

Allen Bloom (1987) said, "Authentic values are those by which a life can be lived, and which can form a people that produces great deeds and thoughts" (p.201).

James Madison told the Virginia Constitutional Ratifying Convention that, If there be no virtue among us, we are in a wretched situation. To suppose that any form of government will

secure liberty or happiness without any virtue in the people is a chimerical idea." In his farewell address George Washington said, "Virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government."

Values are important because they are the commitments people make both to themselves as well as to things beyond themselves. In a sense, they are the manifestations of our wisdom because they indicate what we have identified as most important about our existence. Said otherwise, not to be concerned about values is to admit we are both ignorant and existentially comatosed.

Knowledge is the bridge between cognitive desire and active participation. Knowledge gives insight into the nature of both a problem and its possible solution. It changes would-be participants from random explorers into directionful seekers. It specifies a starting point. In the ongoing values discussion, it identifies two primary needs: more specific definitions and a more focused effort.

Skills are the tools needed to do the task. They answer the question of how to participate in the values discussion. Initially, the critical task is to dialogue with others about values which means to be able to engage in a conversation which generates an experience from which all parties benefit.

The first skill is the ability to live a lifestyle that demonstrates one's values. This means to narrow the gap between what is preached and what is practiced. For example, if health is a value, then the proponents are most effective when they are healthy. It's that old saw 'do as I do, not as I say.' It overcomes the classic criticism that your actions speak so loud I can't hear a word you say.

The second skill is the ability to conduct a productive discussion of values. It has two components: telling and listening. Experience has indicated that these dialogues can be started by first telling others that you would like to talk about values and that you wish to begin by telling about your own experience with one of your values/virtues such as respect or honesty. The second sub55

skill is to become a listener to others by asking them to share their experience of one of their values.

The third skill is the ability to provide others information or sources of information when it will help them increase their knowledge and skills related to values. This skill entails two sub-skills: a continuing effort to familiarize oneself with human and other sources of information pertaining to values and an ability to interject those sources when they are most beneficial to others.

The overall model for participation in the values discussion has three components: living, listening and leading. We might call it the 3L method. Of course, participants will select different target groups. Some will speak only to friends and colleagues, while others will use media for their platform. Whatever level is selected, the salient point is to be prepared with the proper attitude, knowledge and skills to be effective.

For example, advocates of the invitational stance, will probably support respect, trust, optimism and intentionality (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990) as their prime values, or at least those traits will be on their short list. As proponents of those values, the challenge is to represent them effectively in the ongoing national conversation. If the "inviters" demonstrate their values, and engage in a values dialogue with others while being prepared to recommend other sources of information appropriately, then they have a solid starting point for their effort.

Summary

There is an ongoing national discussion of values. It flows from a continuing evolution of moral standards in Western Civilization. Absolutist thinking in the form of the Classical Greek virtues of (courage, justice, temperance and wisdom) dominated until they were challenged successfully by Christian absolutist virtues of faith, hope and love which remained preeminent for almost two millennia. In the 1880s, relativism challenged absolutism, and beginning in the 1950s relativistic thinking energized social activity which modified the existing society that was based mainly on

absolutist thinking. However, in the late 1990s, the tension between absolutism and relativism is generating situations that necessitate a productive resolution of the problems generated by their differences.

In a democratic society like America, national values require extensive citizen participation. However, the involvement of large numbers is only a necessary but not a sufficient condition. The participants must also have the appropriate skills which are; (1) The ability to live their values; (2) the ability to listen to others values discussion; and (3) the ability to assist others find the information for their own values development. This 3L method focuses on citizen dialogues wherein exchanges are facilitated. The goal is the formulation and adoption of a higher order of national values that is commensurate with the demands of the Information Age society that is emerging.

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