The Ethics of Integrity: Educational Values Beyond Postmodern Ethics

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ABSTRACT

I address the problems of diminished moral responsibility and of moral relativism, typically associated with education in late modern society, by developing, beyond the problematic contemporary formulations of postmodern ethics, an *ethics of integrity* as a moral resource for education. This ethics is constituted by the principles of respect for the dignity of persons, and the acceptance of responsibility for the consequences of our moral choices. I show how it offers more than the scant resources of postmodern ethics to educators who seek to enable their students to develop a deeply founded sense of moral comportment and an authentic identity in the face of the moral complexity of late modernity's globalized and plural society.

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The Diminishment of Moral Responsibility in Late Modern Society

My concern in this section is to consider how a diminished moral responsibility is associated with the increasingly fragmented, fragile, and transient nature of identity in late modern society. I assume in this study an interpretation of moral comportment associated with late modernity as observed and described primarily by Bauman (1993), Charles Taylor (1991), and Anthony Giddens (1991). The 'identity' of the self, explains Giddens, 'presumes reflexive awareness':

> It is what the individual is conscious 'of' in the term 'self-consciousness'. Self-identity, in other words, is not something that is just given … but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual. … Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography … as interpreted reflexively by the agent. (1991a, pp. 52, 53)

And for reasons that I will shortly consider, the reflexive construction of identity in modernity is considerably less determined and stable than identity in traditional society. Giddens points out that

> modernity is a post-traditional order, in which the question, 'How shall I live?' has to be answered in day-to-day decisions about how to behave, what to wear and what to eat – and many other things – as well as interpreted within the temporal unfolding of self-identity. (*ibid*., p. 14)

What Giddens refers to as the 'disembedded' nature of identity as a consequence of modernity (and more intensely so as a consequence of late modernity) (1991b, p. 21) is associated by both Bauman and Taylor with a diminished moral responsibility. 'Disembedding' implies the '"lifting out" of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space' (*ibid*.). Bauman's interpretation of this phenomenon is that, given the complexity and increasingly globalized nature of a world constituted by infinitely many social interactions, our actions have consequences far beyond what we could ever imagine.

Modernity's secularizing and iconoclastic processes have produced what has been called the 'disenchantment' of the world, which has in turn contributed to that diminished moral responsibility. Modernity's defeat of the dominantly religious worldview of traditional society has collapsed and discredited sacred orders such as the 'Great Chain of Being', which provided sources of existential definition and meaning in pre-modern society. Pre-modern sources of authority, based on one's rank in the cosmic order of things, were undermined by the advent of modernity, as were established sources of identity, the station into which one was born and spent

one's life. This process rendered the construction of identity and the search for existential meaning up for grabs, as it were, in a world without its prior sources of moral definition. An immediate consequence of the new potential for more fluid identity construction accompanying the collapse of established orders of authority was the rise of individualism. But, where there might have been greater freedom consequent on the collapse of pre-ordained sacred orders, there has been, paradoxically, a loss of freedom. Taylor (1991, pp. 2-10), drawing on Tocqueville, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and others, describes an increasingly atomist and strongly individualist outlook on the world that involves a consequent withdrawal from public life and a minimal sense of moral responsibility to others. Accompanying these developments, in large part because of the moral vacuum consequent on the disenchantment of traditional order and because of the immense power of modern technology, has been a rise in instrumental rationality, a kind of rationality that calculates the most economical or efficient means to a given end with scant regard for the human or other moral consequences. Following the collapse of the pre-ordained order of things, all is open for exploitation by individuals with evanescent moral horizons, a strong sense of individualism, and a minimal concern for responsibility to others. Despite our awareness of an increasing global connectedness and global repercussions in these developments, the atomism consequent on the collapse of the traditional bonds of community vitiates, rather than increases, our sense of responsibility. These are some of the moral consequences of modernity.

In late modern society, moral responsibility is further diminished by the acceleration and intensification of these processes. The problem of moral relativism associated with such a non-foundational orientation and consequent on the contested nature of moral authority in increasingly globalized and multicultural urban environments leaves us with a plethora of options as to the ultimate source of the good and the right. In a world where identities are rendered increasingly shallow by the intensification of a consumerism that is ultimately futile as a source of existential meaning or authentic identity, moral responsibility is further diminished. In his *Legislators and Interpreters*, Bauman (1989, p. 189) points out that

> individual needs of personal autonomy, self-definition, authentic life or personal perfection are all translated into the need to possess, and consume, market-offered goods. This translation, however, pertains to the appearance of use value of such goods, rather than to the use value itself; as such, it is intrinsically inadequate and ultimately self-defeating, leading to momentary assuagement of desires and lasting frustration of needs.[2]

Bauman (1993, pp. 17-20) outlines four moral characteristics of late modernity, which, I should point out, are not necessarily unique to late modern societies (the division of labour, for example, has surely been around at least as far back as Plato's *Republic*, and probably since the establishment of the first human communities), but are certainly more prevalent, with greater compounding effects, in late modernity. First, given the diversity, complexity and increasingly globalized nature of a world constituted by infinitely many social interactions, our actions have consequences far beyond what we could ever imagine – and we just do not have the ethical rules to guide actions the consequences of which cannot be foreseen. Second, the division of labour that characterizes the work we do means that we are just 'bit players' in the

production of a final outcome. Without being able to claim sole authorship for outcomes, we do not easily accept responsibility for their consequences. Third, our existence is fragmented into the temporary occupation of many different roles, none of which might be sufficiently important to define our identity. We therefore do not readily take responsibility for the consequences of the roles we temporarily occupy, since our occupation of the role is so fleeting as not to make it meaningfully constitutive of our identity. Hence there is no necessary consistency or moral responsibility that flows evenly through all of our actions. Young men put temporarily into military uniforms as part of their 'national service' provide an example, on those occasions when they fail to sustain their moral perspective as civilians in their role as part-time soldiers, of Bauman's meaning here. Fourth, the moral discomfort of the consequences of our actions of course sometimes sticks, and we then seek the authority of rules to which we can turn – rules whose authority we might have resented before – for guidance. But with the collapse of traditional sources of authority in modernity, we are unsure of which ethical code to follow. Obedience to one authority implies disobedience to another. Hence the moral ambiguity of our times. What has been described as the 'postmodern moral crisis' lies in the realization that sources of moral authority to which we might have traditionally turned are contested, and there is consequently no given source of right action.

Identity and moral responsibility in contemporary education

The fragmentation, fragility and ephemerality associated with identity in late modernity assume a greater significance in the challenges facing today's young people with respect to their development of identity. In terms of Taylor's (1991) justification from a communitarian perspective of the necessity of accepting the validity of moral demands originating from outside of ourselves and of the necessity of commitment to significant others if we are to develop an authentic identity, a more strongly developed sense of moral responsibility is associated with a more deeply founded identity. A key challenge facing teachers, then, is the development of a more deeply founded sense of identity in their students as a means to a more strongly developed sense of moral responsibility. The ethics of integrity, I will argue, provides the necessary underpinning.

The excessively strong sense of individualism and the consequent withdrawal from commitment, the common acceptance of an instrumental approach to reason, the sense of a life given identity, value, and status in terms essentially of the accumulation of consumer products, and the pervasive devaluation of the worth of any deeper source of meaning, are all moral consequences of late modernity that particularly influence young people, who are still developing their sense of identity. Maxine Greene (1988, p. 7) writes:

> The young (like their elders) are all too likely to remain immersed in the taken-for-granted and the everyday. For many, this means an unreflective consumerism; for others, it means a preoccupation with *having* more rather than *being* more. If freedom comes to mind, it is ordinarily associated with an individualist stance. It signifies a self-dependence rather than relationship;

self-regarding and self-regulated behaviour rather than involvement with others. Above all, it means an absence of interference.

For young people today, continues Greene,

> an unquestioned day might be perceived in the light of the shopping mall culture: fast-food counters, clothing stores, fake plants, skating rinks, video games, and MTV. (1995, p. 23)

And yet, in the schools,

> little, if anything, is done to render problematic a reality that includes homelessness, hunger, pollution, crime, censorship, arms build-ups, and threats of war, even as it includes the amassing of fortunes, consumer goods of unprecedented appeal, world travel opportunities, and the flickering faces of the 'rich and famous' on all sides. Little is done to counter media manipulation of the young into credulous and ardent consumers – of sensation, violence, criminality, things. They are instructed daily, and with few exceptions, that human worth depends on the possession of commodities, community status, a flippant way of talking, good looks. What they are made to believe to be the 'news' is half entertainment, half pretences at being 'windows on the world'. They witness political realities played out in semi-theatrical or cinematic terms. They watch candidates being marketed and withdrawn. In the midst of the marketing and the sounds of sitcom shotguns, there are opportunities to become voyeurs of starvation, massacres, torture. And the beat of MTV goes on and on. (1988, pp. 12-13)

It is in these shallow environments and with respect to these experiences that teachers face the challenges of helping their students to develop a more deeply founded sense of identity and responsibility.

Moral Relativism in Late Modern Society

A second core area of moral complexity associated with late modernity relates to the problem of moral relativism – the position that all moral judgements are contextually, historically, and socio-culturally dependent, and hence that a universal ethics not bound by time or space is impossible – associated with a non-foundational orientation and consequent on the contested nature of moral authority in increasingly multicultural, or plural, educational environments. Multicultural classrooms bring additional challenges to bear on teachers, specifically challenges associated with developing shared values while sustaining respect for particular values.

Late modern society is typically characterized by a plurality of voices. The aspirations of modernity to universal epistemological and ethical norms have given way to a cultural pluralism which makes space for those voices previously occluded by marginalization and the denial of their identities, or by assimilation and the dissolution of their identities. These voices include those of the colonized, of ethnic groups who are not white or European, of women, of religious groups previously

excluded by their minority status or otherwise, and of the rural and urban poor. Education in a multicultural society thus offers learners the opportunity to interact with learners from other cultural backgrounds, to learn about different cultural values, practices, histories, ways of life. This experience of plurality, diversity and difference further offers learners the opportunity to look at their *own* experiences, values, practices and ways of life from different perspectives. This may lead to their becoming more tolerant, more widely educated, less narrow-minded, more tentative about what they assume as certain, more respectful of others, humbler.

But the presence of different values and ethics in a multicultural educational environment raises the difficulties associated with relativism, one of the most serious of which is the instrumentalism potentially consequent on the withdrawal from commitment to core principles. If we withdraw from commitment to core ethics, and any ethics is warranted to be as good as any other (depending merely on whose ethics they are), then the atomism consequent on the loosening of the traditional bonds of community leads very seductively to instrumentalism, or the choosing of options for their efficacy in achieving our ends, with scant regard for the moral or human consequences

This withdrawal from commitment into a comfortably sceptical relativism becomes particularly seductive in a multicultural environment. Ternasky (1993, pp. 117-124) has outlined how a defence of moral relativism is often constructed on the grounds of moral disagreement, moral diversity or tolerance. Since we are often faced with disagreement about right and wrong, and also about how even to set about reaching agreement, some might then conclude that relativism is the best justification for ethics. Since cross-cultural diversity reveals ethical norms that differ from culture to culture, the seduction of relativism might lead to the conclusion that acceptable behaviour is simply that which conforms to one's culture. And when faced with another culture's practices which are different to one's own, tolerance often appears to be a better response than condemnation – but it is often assumed that tolerance can emerge only from a relativism that does not elevate one culture above another. This can of course be self-contradictory when one comes across a cultural perspective that is intolerant of others. The deeper moral principle of tolerance based in liberalism or in what I will defend as the first principle of the ethics of integrity, respect for the dignity of our and each other's being, is generally lost in the immediate attraction of a relativistic tolerance.

The key question for our purposes in this domain, given that the challenges of teaching in a multicultural classroom face most teachers in late modern society, is whether there are any core values that can be defended in education, irrespective of the cultural background of the participants. More specifically, in a multicultural classroom characterized by numerous competing values and moral norms, must we accept moral relativism, or are there any values and ethics to which we can expect all participants in the educational process, whatever their cultural background, to be committed? Moral relativism is after all a distinct possibility in a multicultural classroom. Whose ethics are to prevail? The school's, by virtue of its inertial momentum in defining the normal? The teacher's, by virtue of her authority in the classroom? Those of the pupils who enjoy a cultural majority in the classroom? The ethics of those who were previously marginalized and who may demand recognition

of their claims, perhaps simply because they are different or because of the prior occlusion of their identities? Or nobody's, where the equal validity of all claims is assumed and, in Feyerabend's (1993, pp. 18-19) terms, 'anything goes'?[3]

Moral relativism is of course, as we discussed earlier, not immediately to be feared: recognition of the worth of moral perspectives other than those of one's own culture is certainly a well documented potential advantage of multicultural education. Steven Lukes (1995, pp. 178-79) has pointed out that, despite the well-known objections,

> there is a surviving truth in moral relativism, if it is modestly construed in the spirit of Montaigne, as a requirement of caution on those who make, and above all apply, moral judgements, especially if they are powerful and do so in alien moral cultural contexts. Understood in this way, the relativist reaction to moral diversity can serve as an antidote to the dangers of hasty and overbearing ethnocentrism and abstract rationalistic moralising.

Lukes defends ethnocentrism as, 'in a certain sense … methodologically inevitable', but for the relativist who aims to understand the rationality of the other's perspective 'from within' (*ibid*., p. 179).

The problem lies rather in *strong* relativism, where instrumentalism is a potential consequence, in the terms I outlined earlier, of a withdrawal from commitment to a foundational ethics. If a strongly relativist understanding of the world teaches us that we have no foundational or universal grounds from which to condemn racist or sexist practices in other cultures, then what is there to stop us from adopting an entirely instrumental orientation in our own world? This is the deeper issue that underlies my central question in this domain, motivated in part by Lukes' question whether 'the very idea of a universal morality [is] a pre-postmodern illusion' (*ibid*., p. 173).

Bauman's Postmodern Ethics

We turn now to Bauman's response to these issues, as set out in his *Postmodern Ethics* and elsewhere, with the aim of showing that ultimately his postmodern ethics are inadequate as a moral resource for contemporary education. Bauman conceptualizes the postmodern perspective as concerned with the unmasking of the 'illusions' of modernity, arguing that the essence of the postmodern approach to ethics lies

> not in the abandoning of characteristically modern moral concerns, but in the rejection of the typically modern ways of going about its moral problems (that is, responding to moral challenges with coercive normative regulation in political practice, and the philosophical search for absolutes, universals and foundations in theory). (1993, p. 4)

Our 'search for absolutes, universals and foundations in theory' has probably been tempered by our realization, as a consequence of the multicultural spaces we now inhabit in an increasingly globalized world, that ours is a plural world, with a diversity of perspectives and claims to truth, beauty, and goodness. And our 'coercive

normative' and regulatory response to moral challenges in political practice has probably been tempered by our horror at the cruelty and suffering we have witnessed at the height of modernity in the twentieth century. The Soviet state's attempts at rational planning and management of virtually every aspect of its citizens' lives resulted in the death of millions under Stalin's rule on a scale the likes of which had never been seen before, even under the Tsars.[4] The Nazis' systematic attempts to exterminate the entire Jewish population of Europe resulted in a holocaust of six million dead in the likes of Auschwitz and Birkenau. The South African apartheid state's attempts to re-design and engineer an entire society along racial lines through legislated ethnicity, the creation of puppet states within a state and massive forced removals and controls on population movement resulted in untold misery for millions at the hands of a relatively small but all-pervasive militarized bureaucracy. This human cruelty and suffering is not unique to the high modern era: terror in all its forms has been a fact of history. What is awful about this terror is its scale, made possible by the technology and bureaucracy of modernity, which allowed systematically and rationally planned large-scale execution, in an era when we had available to us the constitutional arrangements of liberalism and democracy. Our scepticism towards the 'search for absolutes', towards 'coercive normative regulation' in the political domain of those who are different, is because of that to which we have been witness this past century. Hence the celebration of diversity and plurality in the postmodern perspective. Hence the abandonment of coercive and regulatory ethical codes.

Postmodern ethics is thus, to use Bauman's (1993, p. 31) aphorism, 'morality without ethical code'. While the moral thought and practice of modernity may have been 'animated by the belief in the possibility of a *non-ambivalent*, *non-aporetic ethical code*', what is *post*modern is the '*disbelief* in such a possibility' (*ibid.*, pp. 9, 10): *post* not in the chronological sense, but in the sense of offering a critique of modernity. The postmodern insight into morality is that in an era when the range of our moral choices and the consequences of our actions are more far-reaching than ever before, we are unable to rely on a universal ethical code that would yield unambiguously good solutions:

> Human reality is messy and ambiguous – and so moral decisions, unlike abstract ethical principles, are ambivalent. It is in this sort of world that we must live …. Knowing that to be the truth … is to be postmodern. Postmodernity, one may say, is *modernity without illusions* (the obverse of which is that modernity is postmodernity refusing to accept its own truth). The illusions in question boil down to the belief that the 'messiness' of the human world is but a temporary and repairable state, sooner or later to be replaced by the orderly and systematic rule of reason. The truth in question is that the 'messiness' will stay whatever we do or know, that the little orders and 'systems' we carve out in the world are … as arbitrary and in the end contingent as their alternatives. (*ibid.*, pp. 32-33)

This last assertion of Bauman's, that any ethics is as 'arbitrary' and 'contingent' as any other, is not necessarily consequent on his characterization of 'human reality' as 'messy and ambiguous'. It is my concern in this paper to show that an ethics that is not arbitrary and contingent can be derived from Bauman's characterization of

postmodern morality. Bauman's response to the ambiguity of human reality is based in his position that it is our *moral capacity* that essentially defines us as human beings:

> It is society, its continuing existence and its well-being, that is made possible by the moral competence of its members – not the other way round …. Rather than reiterating that there would be no moral individuals if not for the training/drilling job performed by society, we move toward the understanding that it must be the moral capacity of human beings that makes them so conspicuously capable to form societies and against all odds to secure their – happy or less happy – survival …. [I]t is the personal morality that makes ethical negotiation and consensus possible, not the other way round. (*ibid*., pp. 32, 34)

It becomes clear that Bauman is a moral intuitionist, forsaking the 'comprehensive ethical code' in favour of 'human moral intuition and ability to negotiate the art and usages of living together'. Out of such a position comes the possibility of 'facing human moral capacity point-blank', of 're-personaliz[ing]' it, without a surrender to the constraints (and consequent moral absolution) of 'artificially constructed ethical codes'. Significantly, this quintessential statement of postmodern morality returns to Kant's 'mystery of morality inside me' (1949, p. 258) in claiming that it is the 'primary "brute fact" of moral impulse, moral responsibility, moral intimacy that supplies the stuff from which the morality of human cohabitation is made' (Bauman, 1993, pp. 33, 34, 35).

Bauman seeks to avoid the universalism inherent in Kant's (1990, p. 38) categorical imperative to 'act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law'. But his assertion, seeking also to avoid foundations, that 'if in doubt – consult your conscience' (Bauman, 1993, p. 250) is surprisingly close to deontological ethics. Postmodern ethics could almost be characterized – and I will show how, by reference to the moral intuitionist, W. D. Ross – in terms of an intuitionist deontology: not of course quite as deontological as Kant's classical statement, since Bauman's conscience-guided morality would be more sensitive to the contextual specifics of a particular dilemma than would Kant's transcendental position. We will see that Bauman argues for the natural predispositions in conscience to act morally, quite the opposite of an ethics constituted by 'artificially designed rules'. We will also notice that he is exceedingly suspicious of any attempt at moral reasoning: for him, all rationality is interpreted instrumentally. He is wrong here, I think, and I have made the case elsewhere (see Note 5, below) for the possibility of moral reflection.

Bauman outlines the following characteristics of the moral condition from a postmodern perspective. First, humans are morally ambivalent: they are neither essentially good nor essentially bad. Postmodern ethics holds that it is therefore impossible to design a logically coherent ethical code to accommodate our ultimately ambivalent moral condition. We can therefore never guarantee moral conduct, and systems designed with this end in mind often produce 'more cruelty than humanity, and certainly less morality' (*ibid*., p. 11).

Second, moral phenomena are inherently pre-rational: they cannot be construed instrumentally, since they are defined as moral phenomena 'only if they precede the consideration of purpose and the calculation of gains and losses' (*ibid*.). Bauman actually uses the term '*non*-rational' because he wishes to construe moral phenomena non-instrumentally: this assumes an instrumental definition of rationality. I prefer to describe this position using the term '*pre*-rational', because it is consistent with Bauman's position that the essence of our existence, what defines us as human, is our moral capacity, and because it allows for the possibility of reflective morality. While accepting Bauman's position, I have defended elsewhere the possibility of a reflective morality in terms of a non-instrumental understanding of rationality by which moral argument is possible.[5]

Moral phenomena construed as pre-rational can therefore not be rule-guided or subject to any ethical code, since they are neither explicable in terms of their use-value, nor consistent or predictable. While it may appear that moral phenomena are therefore arbitrary, what Bauman intends is that they cannot be heteronomous, as would be the case where ethics is construed in terms of law. To do thus would be to leave out what is properly moral in ethics:

> It shifts moral phenomena from the realm of personal autonomy into that of power-assisted heteronomy. It substitutes the learnable knowledge of rules for the moral self constituted by responsibility. It places answerability to the legislators and guardians of the code where there had formerly been answerability to the Other and to moral self-conscience, the context in which moral stand is taken. (*ibid*.)

What Bauman calls 'answerability to the Other' entails the acknowledgement of moral demands emanating from outside of ourselves and a non-instrumental orientation to our relationships with others. These are core attributes of Taylor's (1991) 'ethics of authenticity', which I have considered more fully elsewhere.[6]

What Bauman means when he describes moral phenomena as inherently non-rational may be difficult to understand in an age of reason where we take the possibility of moral reflection and reason almost for granted. Perhaps the best way to understand his position is by analogy with the nature of love. Love, we accept, is not a product of reason or reflection; it is not a conclusion we can reach rationally. A demonstrative gesture is, after all, only truly affectionate if it is spontaneous. A calculated demonstration of affection would hardly count as such, and would probably be better interpreted in terms of its instrumental purposes. Bauman understands morality in similar vein. For him, moral action ceases to be moral if it is the result of a rational decision. Its rational calculation makes it susceptible to instrumental interpretation. It would smack of an ulterior motive, of heteronomous obeisance to the authority of an external code, or simply of duty in the Kantian sense. Bauman's moral universe is infinitely larger than what he perceives as the shrunken universe of Kant's duty-bound morality. The spontaneity of moral action, and this is its essence, lies in our infinite responsibility to the Other (for whom we are unboundedly responsible in our face-to-face relationship with him or her), and in our conscience, unmediated by reason.

This is a very seductive understanding of morality, not easily challenged, as far as I can see, in the domain of the immediately interpersonal. But in the public domain and, particularly for our purposes, in the realms of education, perhaps individual conscience-driven morality is not as easily justifiable, constituted as it is in a domain governed by demands for public accountability and transparency. Justifying moral decisions by recourse to conscience becomes, furthermore, all the more difficult in multicultural educational environments, when we recall that conscience is probably in large part culturally shaped. The problem of relativism still looms. It is in accepting Bauman's interpretation of a spontaneous and unmediated interpersonal morality that I want not to refute him, but to stand, as it were, on his shoulders in the development of the ethics of integrity as a moral resource in both the public and the private domains.

The third characteristic of the moral condition from a postmodern perspective is that morality is incurably aporetic: it is always fraught with irreconcilable contradictions, since few choices (other than the relatively trivial and the existentially uninteresting) produce unambiguously good consequences. Modernity's quest for ethical certainty is therefore impossible.

Fourth, morality cannot be universalized: attempts to universalize morality merely substitute 'heteronomous … ethical rules for the autonomous responsibility of the moral self, … [resulting in] the incapacitation, even destruction of the moral self'. Attempts to universalize morality merely silence moral impulse (Bauman, 1993, p. 12).

Fifth, from the perspective of the 'rational order', the order legislated by society's moral custodians, morality is and is bound to remain irrational. Totalitarian visions of ethical universality are thus threatened by individual moral autonomy and committed to its domestication.

Sixth, moral responsibility – being *for* the Other before one can be *with* the Other – is the first reality of the self: a starting point rather than a product of society. Bauman's position is that our moral capacity precedes the emergence of society: 'there is no self before the moral self, morality being the ultimate, non-determined presence' (*ibid*., p. 13). 'Moral responsibility is precisely the act of self-constitution (*ibid*., p. 14)'. For Bauman, the essence of our existence, what defines us as human, is our moral capacity. Accepting this, I assume further that what defines us as human is also our rational capacity. It is our moral and rational capacities that make us capable of moral reflection.

Seventh, and rather surprisingly, Bauman claims that the postmodern perspective on moral phenomena does not reveal the relativism of morality: an assertion quite contrary to the 'anything goes' triumphalism of certain postmodernist writers.[7] Interestingly, his negation of the universalizability of morality is not an endorsement of moral relativism. He agrees that ethical relativism has nihilistic implications, placing his faith in our essentially human moral capacity:

> By exposing the essential incongruity between any power-assisted ethical
> code on the one hand and the infinitely complex condition of the moral self on

the other, and by exposing the falsity of society's pretence to be the ultimate author and the sole trustworthy guardian of morality, the postmodern perspective shows the relativity of ethical codes and of moral practices they recommend or support to be the outcome of the *politically* promoted parochiality of *ethical codes* that pretend to be universal, and not of the 'uncodified' moral condition and moral conduct which they decried as parochial. It is the ethical codes which are plagued with relativism. (*ibid*.)

The postmodern perspective has exposed the politically inspired myth of ethical universality and the hegemonic aspirations of competing ethical codes, revealing instead the complexity of our common moral condition and claiming legitimacy for moral autonomy in the face of ethical heteronomy. The moral unity of humanity is thinkable, claims Bauman (1993, pp. 14, 15), 'not as the end-product of globalizing the domain of political powers with ethical pretensions', but in the possibility of deconstructing the universalist claims of politically motivated ethical legislators, in the 'prospect of the emancipation of the autonomous moral self and vindication of its moral responsibility', and in the possibility of the moral self confronting the inherent ambivalence consequent on that moral responsibility.

While Bauman is certainly correct that it is the existence of competing ethical codes that reveals their relativism with respect to each other, to claim that individual conscience-guided moral autonomy in the absence of ethical heteronomy could possibly reveal the moral unity of humanity is stretching the point: first, it is widely accepted that conscience is at least partly culturally influenced, and thus individual morality guided by conscience is still going to reveal to some extent the relativism between cultures; and second, individual conscience-guided moral autonomy without a shared foundational ethics will multiply the factors generating moral relativism between cultural codes rather than minimize them. Individual conscience-guided moral autonomy laudably increases the potential for moral responsibility, but, without a shared foundational ethics, on its own it will perpetuate the nihilism consequent on the 'anything goes' attitude of strong relativist positions.

Although Bauman doesn't specifically delineate the following (eighth) characteristic of the moral condition in a postmodern perspective, what is evident in his and other postmodern writing is that postmodern morality is non-foundational: there exist no *a priori* foundations of morality on which hegemonic ethical codes can be built – hegemonic in the sense that consent is freely given to be governed in terms of that principle and its derivatives. Bauman (1993, p. 15) cautions instead that postmodern ethics will yield no ethical code, and neither will the postmodern perspective on the condition of the moral self make moral life any easier: at most it will infuse our condition with a little more moral potential.

Beyond Postmodern Ethics

By arguing from and beyond the assumptions of postmodern ethics, I defend in this paper, as a moral resource for educators, the ethics of integrity, constituted by the principles of respect for the dignity of our and each other's being, and the acceptance of responsibility for the consequences of our moral choices. My central thesis is that

the ethics of integrity offer moral resources for education in late modernity more fertile than those offered by Bauman's postmodern ethics. My chief concern now is to derive from Bauman's postmodern ethics the ethics of integrity. The justification for this move, as the central step in this paper, or the reason that I have chosen to derive the ethics of integrity from Bauman's postmodern ethics, is primarily because Bauman, as I have shown, offers, in the light of the insights of postmodernism, a seductively attractive ethics in response to moral comportment in late modernity. His is an ethics for our time, and an ethics that is not easily challenged in the domain of the immediately interpersonal. Since his is one of the most coherent contemporary ethical formulations in response to our experience of late modernity, it is on Bauman's shoulders, as I have said, that I wish to stand in developing an ethics as a moral resource for domains wider than the immediately interpersonal – more specifically, for our purposes, for the domain of education in late modernity.

Although Bauman's postmodern ethics, eschewing as it does the very possibility of ethical codes, may be impervious to the charge of relativism, the possibility of relativism still looms large in a multicultural educational environment. For despite his assertions to the contrary, the culturally plural classroom does face us with competing moral claims codified in the ethical paradigms of different cultures, a difficulty not easily resolved by his claim of an unlimited responsibility for the Other. And a retreat in the face of cultural relativism from a foundational moral position leaves us vulnerable to instrumentalism: as I argued earlier, if, in the face of competing moral claims from divergent cultural domains, we are left without foundational moral criteria for adjudication, a potential consequence is a cynical withdrawal into instrumentalism. If no ultimate moral right can be defended, why should I not exploit others for my own ends? Bauman's postmodern ethics can still be further developed if it is to be a really worthwhile moral resource for education in late modernity.

The derivation of the ethics of integrity from Bauman's postmodern ethics

Bauman's non-foundational 'morality without ethical code' (1993, p. 31) leaves us with little more than a claim of unbridled responsibility for the Other.[8] For the source of this claim, Bauman turns to Levinas, who posits an inextricable link between identity and moral responsibility: 'I am I,' he says, 'in the sole measure that I am responsible' (Levinas, 1985, p. 101). I establish an authentic identity, in other words, to the extent that I accept responsibility for the consequences of my decisions and actions. This is consistent with Taylor's grounds for the development of an authentic identity through at least the acceptance of moral demands that originate from beyond ourselves. Bauman finds this moral imperative also in the work of the Danish moral philosopher, Knud Løgstrup, whose 'ethical demand' 'has the effect of making the person to whom the demand is directed an individual in the precise sense of the word' (Løgstrup, 1971, p. 47). For Løgstrup, as for Levinas, it is our acceptance of the moral demands of responsibility that makes us the unique individuals that we are. For Bauman (1993, p. 77),

it is such responsibility – utterly, completely unheteronomous, radically unlike the responsibility on behest, or obligations stemming from contractual duty – that makes me into I. That responsibility does not 'derive' from anything else.

For Bauman, there is, in other words, no further foundation for ethics than this sense of unbridled responsibility to the Other. This is why ethics is 'first philosophy' for Levinas, Løgstrup, and Bauman. Levinas suggests that the starting point of philosophy is not so much 'contemplative wonder', but 'the face of the Other'.[9] It is in this sense that moral responsibility precedes the ontological self: in the sense that I become an authentic and unique human being only in the acceptance of moral responsibility. A refusal to do so leaves me less than fully human.

But Bauman's non-foundational 'morality without ethical code' (1993, p. 31) leaves us not only with this sense of unlimited responsibility to the Other, but also with the injunction, if in doubt, to 'consult your conscience' (*ibid*., p. 250). This reliance on conscience is, as we have seen, inadequate in the public domain that is education, but is an important starting point for my derivation of the ethics of integrity beyond Bauman's postmodern ethics.

It is with reference to W. D. Ross, who is generally understood as a moral intuitionist, that I characterize Bauman's argument as intuitionist. Ross argues that we have 'certain basic convictions, or intuitions of conscience, about how we ought to [act]',[10] and that many such 'moral convictions of the plain man' are correct. 'I am *assuming*,' he says, 'the correctness of some of our main convictions as to *prima facie* duties, or, more strictly, am claiming that we *know* them to be true' (emphasis original) (cited by Cottingham, 1996, p. 408). While Ross may thus appear deontological in his moral orientation (and he certainly is far more so than consequentialist), he rejects Kant's concept of categorical duties that do not countenance any exceptions. Hence his stress on the *prima facie* nature of duty, by which he intends that the degree of obligatoriness attaching to a particular duty depends on the circumstances, and that the duty may thus be outweighed by other duties that prevail simultaneously. It is by recourse to our basic convictions, to our intuitions of conscience, that we know which duty to honour first. He doesn't offer a systematic defence of this position, claiming only that it corresponds quite closely with the way we think when we consider what we ought to do in situations requiring moral decisions. Whether one accepts this justification or not, it is strongly reminiscent of Kant's 'mystery of morality within me' (see above) which he employs in his construction of the categorical imperative: the fundamental difference between them being, of course, that Kant relies on an investigation as to whether the conviction could hold as a universal law in laying down imperatives that are categorical and not *prima facie*. Hence my characterization of Ross's ethics as intuitionist deontology. It is in this sense, and with reference to his return to Kant's 'mystery of morality within me', that I understand Bauman's argument, at root, to be intuitionist.

However, underlying an intuitionist position is an assumed principle: that we respect the dignity of our and each other's being as a prerequisite for the confidence we place in our and in other's moral positions. Acceptance of this obligation implies a willingness to take responsibility for the moral choices we make. We strive continually to grow morally towards this goal of taking responsibility for the moral

choices we make because we respect the dignity of our and each other's being. This process constitutes what I postulate as the ethics of integrity: a life identified by commitment to growth towards integrity is a life that is inescapably responsible for moral choices made, and inextricably connected to respect for the dignity of being and ensuing moral commitments. Conversely, a life respectful of the dignity of being and responsible for that commitment's moral consequences is a life whose identity is defined first and last in terms of integrity. The ethics of integrity, then, imply respect for the dignity of being, and responsibility for moral choices.

To restate the derivation more formally, having no respect for the dignity of our and each other's being gives us no grounds to trust our conscience. From this we can deduce, by the truth of the contrapositive, that if we are to trust our conscience as a moral resource, then it implies that we respect the dignity of our and each other's being. From this respect for the dignity of being I derived the principle of responsibility for the moral choices we make from the observation that respect is not a necessary condition for responsibility (we may act responsibly for reasons other than respect, such as fear of eternal damnation), but it is a sufficient condition for responsibility. In other words, respect for the dignity of our and each other's being implies that we take responsibility for the moral choices that we make. Or, again by the truth of the contrapositive, this can be derived from the observation that not taking responsibility for our moral choices implies that we do not respect the dignity of our and each other's being.

Bauman's assertion that 'moral proximity, responsibility, and the uniqueness – irreplaceability – of the moral subject are triune; they will not survive (or, rather, would not be born) without each other' (1993, p. 242) is consistent with the position I am advocating: for Bauman, 'being for Others [is the] cornerstone of all morality' (*ibid*., p. 244), and 'moral responsibility is the most personal and inalienable of human possessions' (*ibid*., p. 250). The ethics of integrity, however, go further than Bauman in my derivation of the obligation that we respect the dignity of our and each other's being. Acts that violate this principle, or of course the principle of responsibility for the consequences of our decisions, may thus be justifiably proscribed.

Elsewhere I have shown how the ethics of integrity may be postulated as a dialectical morality.[11] As a dialectical morality, I have argued that the ethics of integrity is sensitive both to universalist positions and to non-foundational moral positions, concluding that moral judgement and action are inescapably wrought by a tension between the objectivity of foundational commitment and solidarity's face-to-face responsibility.

The Ethics of Integrity and Authentic Identity

Our consideration of the first of two core problems addressed in this paper, the diminished moral responsibility associated with the increasingly fragmented, fragile, and transient nature of identity in late modern society, highlighted, in Giddens's terms, the disembedded nature of identity as a consequence of modernity, and more intensely so as a consequence of late modernity (1991b, p. 21). This phenomenon, as we saw,

implies the loosening of the bonds of local community, and hence a diminished sense of moral responsibility in our primary relationships. We saw how a secularizing process of modernization has hastened the disenchantment of the world and left us without a given sense of identity. Both Bauman (1989, p. 189) and Giddens have described how this has led to the translation of individual needs for self-definition and authentic life into the need to possess consumer goods, as if through an identity with brand labels we might construct an identity for ourselves. The act of consumption has become an act of identity construction. Bauman pointed, as we saw, to the intrinsically futile search for an authentic identity in the possession of consumer goods, primarily because satisfaction is sought more in terms of appearance value than in terms of any deeper value. It is in response to this frustration that I posit the ethics of integrity as an ethics that seeks an authentic identity in respect and responsibility.

While the aggregate weight of postmodern scepticism points to the nature of identity as not given or fixed, but as radically constructed, and hence to the impossibility of even the idea of an authentic identity, I wish to take advantage of this space to define authenticity in terms of the ethics of integrity. We approach an authentic identity to the extent that we respect the dignity of our and each other's being, and to the extent that we take responsibility for the consequences of our actions. Such an understanding of authenticity has the advantage of 're-embedding' us in our primary relationships in our immediate communities, in the sense that we accept responsibility, in our respect for each other, for our decisions and actions, in an acknowledgement of our mutual integrity as persons. Such an understanding of authenticity excludes the possibility of an instrumental orientation to our relationships with others, in that such an orientation, by virtue of my definition of authenticity in the ethics of integrity, would violate the principle of respect for the dignity of our and each other's being, and hence debase the possibility of an authentic existence.

This conceptualization of authenticity is consistent with Levinas's claim that 'I am I in the sole measure that I am responsible' (1985, p. 101). It is consistent with Seyla Benhabib's project to situate the self in a local context that is informed by ideals such as 'universal respect for each person in view of their humanity … and the formation of solidaristic human associations' (1992, p. 2). And it is also consistent with Taylor's ethics of authenticity. Mutual respect for the dignity of being is of course associated with Taylor's emphasis on the obligations of commitment in relationship with significant others as an essential aspect of an authentic identity. And acceptance of responsibility for the consequences of our moral decisions is associated with Taylor's emphasis on the necessity of accepting the validity of moral demands originating from outside of ourselves as an essential aspect of an authentic identity.

The well-known metaphor that we are more like onions than, say, peaches, arises from a postmodern scepticism of the possibility of our identity's being defined in terms of an essence to be found in the core of our being. We are not like peaches in that we do not have a kernel at our core that contains our essential authenticity. We are more like onions in that we are made of layers without an essential core: peeling away successive layers will not reveal any essential kernel. In the understanding of authenticity that I posit here, a life lived in terms of the ethics of integrity is a life that approaches authenticity through the growth of successive layers nurtured in respect

for the dignity of being, and in the acceptance of responsibility for the consequences of our actions.

The ethics of integrity, identity, and meaning

In a world of contested authority, when we are no longer certain that God exists, when, in what Giddens calls our 'reflexive project of [the construction of] the self' (1991a, p. 9), we are faced with existential questions about our own identity, when we are confronted with 'personal meaninglessness, … a fundamental psychic problem in circumstances of late modernity' (*ibid*.), I wish to posit the ethics of integrity as a possible source of meaningful identity construction. In late modernity we face the project of constructing an identity in terms that give meaning to our existence, without the parameters that may have provided that meaning in a pre-modern, traditional society. In traditional society, meaning may have been given to us in the religious worldview into which we were socialized. Prior to its disenchantment by the secularizing process of modernity, the cosmic order of things would have provided us with a sense of meaning and place. Our religious and communal rituals would have given meaning and a moral purpose through the expression of traditional rites of passage to those defining moments of our existence such as the passage through puberty into adulthood, marriage, giving birth to new life, the death of loved ones, and our own death. Giddens sees in late modernity attempts to infuse meaning into our lives in efforts at reconstructing tradition, in the resurgence of religious belief, and in the formation of new social movements (*ibid*., pp. 202-208). This occurs, he maintains, in response to the 'looming threat of personal meaninglessness' as a consequence of a 'morally arid social environment' due in large part to 'the pervasiveness of abstract systems' (*ibid*., p. 201). Whereas meaning might have been generated in one's relationships with one's community, with the earth and its seasons, with one's God who presided over the cosmic order, we no longer to such an extent nurture, or seek to be nurtured in, our social environment: hence its aridity. We seek instead to reduce the risk and uncertainty of our lives in abstract calculation for the purposes of control. We turn less to each other and more to our technological ability to calculate and control.

> The threat of personal meaninglessness is ordinarily held at bay because routinised activities, in combination with basic trust, sustain ontological security. Potentially disturbing existential questions are defused by the controlled nature of day-to-day activities within internally referential systems. Mastery, in other words, substitutes for morality. (*ibid*., p. 202)

But at what Giddens calls 'fateful moments' – divorce, the death of a loved one, one's own imminent death – 'we may be forced to confront concerns which the smooth working of reflexively ordered abstract systems normally keep well away from consciousness' (*ibid*.). Fateful moments disrupt our routinely ordered control, forcing us to confront profound questions about our existence. It is my contention that the ethics of integrity will stand us in good stead in our confrontation with such questions.

If there is no given meaning or ordained purpose to our lives, if there is no essence to our existence, then perhaps meaning, purpose, and fulfilment might be found in two

inextricably connected domains: in our sense of self (despite that this may seem to beg the question, if we are to construct our identity for meaning), and in our closest relationships. If we become who we are by virtue, at least in part, of the relationships in which we exist, it is in those relationships that we may be nurtured in our dread of being utterly alone and of the eternal void. And if our sense of self is sufficiently strongly developed in our experiences and in our relationships, then we may take strength simply in who we are. The ethics of integrity is foundational to this endeavour, in that nurturing the relationships that in turn nurture us depends on our respect for the dignity of the being of others, and on our accepting responsibility for the consequences of our decisions. The ethics of integrity is further foundational here in the sense that a strongly developed sense of self depends also on respect for the dignity of our own being.

Educators faced with the challenge of helping young persons to develop for themselves an authentic identity and a sense of meaning and purpose in a late modern world that tends to offer little support for either endeavour, may do worse than turn to the ethics of integrity. The ethics of integrity offers both a signpost of the importance of nurturing ourselves and our significant others in relationship, and a benchmark of authentic and meaningful practice in this endeavour. It offers a universal ideal towards which we may strive in our immediate and wider contexts. It maps the terrain in which we struggle to these ends, and supports our efforts in this regard.

The Ethics of Integrity and Multicultural Learning Environments

We considered as the second of two core problems addressed in this paper the possibility and problem of moral relativism associated with a non-foundational orientation and consequent on the contested nature of moral authority in increasingly multicultural educational environments. We noted that multicultural classrooms bring additional challenges to bear on teachers, specifically those associated with the development of shared values while sustaining respect for particular values. The key question we identified in this domain, given that the challenges of teaching in a multicultural classroom face most teachers in late modern society, is whether there are any core values that can be defended in education, irrespective of the cultural background of the participants. More specifically, in a multicultural classroom characterized by numerous competing values and moral norms, we asked whether we have to accept moral relativism, or whether there are any values and ethics to which we can expect all participants in the educational process, whatever their cultural background, to be committed. Whose ethics, we asked, are to prevail?

The ethics of integrity suggests the possibility of the discursive development of moral principles in a multicultural educational environment, which will acknowledge the tensions among the values and ethics of the different voices present in such a plural context. But we can insist, by virtue of the ethics of integrity, that all participants both respect the dignity of each other's being and take responsibility for their moral choices. Values and moral practices that violate these constituents of the ethics of integrity may thus justifiably be excluded from the classroom. Likewise, we may defend our moral judgements and actions in multicultural educational contexts if we

are respectful of the dignity of all those present and if we take responsibility for the moral choices we make.

In terms of the ethics of integrity, we can expect all of those present in a multicultural classroom to be sensitive to the different ethical norms that will inevitably be put forward in such a context, and to be tolerant of different moral perspectives. We should certainly, in terms of the arguments of Steven Lukes (1995, pp. 173-79), which we considered earlier, defend a mild version of moral relativism that accepts that our ethical norms are at least partly dependent on our cultural background. But a strong moral relativism that insists that all ethical norms brought to bear in a multicultural context are equally valid cannot be defended in terms of these arguments. Practices that may be viewed in modern Western urban perspectives as sexist, for example, would be excluded on the grounds that they do not respect the dignity of women. Racist practices that may persist, however subtly, as a result of the legacy of a predominantly white history, would be excluded on the grounds that they do not respect the dignity of black people. It is in this sense that we may begin to formulate answers to the questions that beset multicultural educational environments.

The problem of moral relativism associated with a non-foundational orientation and consequent on the contested nature of moral authority in increasingly multicultural educational environments is thus addressed by positing and defending the ethics of integrity against strong relativism. The answer to our question whether, in a multicultural classroom characterized by numerous competing values and moral norms, we must accept moral relativism, is, therefore, negative. There are some values and ethics to which we can expect all participants in the educational process, whatever their cultural background, to be committed. These values and ethics are those of the ethics of integrity and those values that follow directly from its principles, such as honesty and fairness in all classroom relationships. Any breaches of these values and ethics may, in terms of the arguments I have presented here, be legitimately proscribed by the teacher.

In these respects, the ethics of integrity are consistent with the view of Ternasky when he suggests (1993, pp. 119-20) that, like scientific facts, moral facts can be established. Like scientific facts, they may be difficult to establish, they may be subject to misinterpretation, they may be dependent on their theoretical foundations, but disagreement alone cannot justify moral relativism. The ethics of integrity point towards the sort of moral facts that Ternasky describes.

Situated as we are in multicultural educational environments, it is important to note that the assertion of a foundational ethic is not an exclusive (in either the colonialist or the fundamentalist sense) ethic. The ethics of integrity implies tolerance of other cultural perspectives on morality. This it does in two ways: by the assertion of a foundational principle of mutual respect, and by the postulation of the ethics of integrity as a dialectical morality.

The first way in which the ethics of integrity enjoins tolerance of other cultural perspectives on morality is by virtue of the principle of respect for the dignity of each other's being. Such an ethics constitutes the deepest sense in which we can provide for tolerance of difference and diversity. Without the principle of mutual respect for

each other's culture, coexistence in a multicultural society would be marked by violence by more powerful groups against weaker groups. So the assertion of a foundational principle of mutual respect is anything but exclusionary. Basil Singh makes a similar point in suggesting that from a 'liberal democratic value perspective', which assumes 'equal recognition of personal worth and personal dignity',

> one cannot reject or fail to give recognition to the existence of the plurality of value perspectives – many of which may derive from various cultures – without being inconsistent in terms of such a value perspective. (1996, p. 303)

The second way in which the ethics of integrity enjoins tolerance of other cultural perspectives on morality is by virtue of its constitution as a dialectical morality. One pole of this dialectic is the principle of mutual respect for the dignity of being: that I have asserted as universal and foundational. The other pole is constituted by our taking responsibility for our moral decisions. This pole acknowledges that we are moved to act morally by the demands of a particular situation in which we are involved at the level of Bauman's responsibility for the Other – irrespective of prevailing ethical codes. The immediate move to act here is spurred by the face-to-face demands of the situation and our responsibility to the Other for the consequences of our moral choices. This pole of the dialectic is not constrained by ethical code. And my assertion of the dialectic within which moral judgement and action are wrought establishes the ethics of integrity as foundational at one pole, but as anything but exclusionary.

Thus do the ethics of integrity offer a more worthwhile response than the scant resources of postmodern ethics to educators who seek to enable their students to develop a more deeply founded sense of moral comportment and a more authentic identity in the face of the moral complexity of late modernity's globalized and plural society.

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NOTES

1. I have published elsewhere my derivation of the ethics of integrity from Bauman's postmodern ethics: see especially Mark Mason (2000). For the sake of completeness I have included core aspects of the argument here.
2. While the appearance of use value, which is commonly associated with branding, is, because ultimately vacuous, of limited use in self-definition, the straightforward use value of market-offered goods may ultimately prove more satisfying. The branding, for example, of an item of athletic apparel may earn us temporary esteem from peers who place value on that particular brand; the actual use of the apparel for its apparent purpose may enable us to establish for ourselves an identity as a successful athlete that may ultimately prove more substantially meaningful.

3. See Paul Feyerabend (1993), pp. 18-19, where he suggests that 'there is only one principle that can be defended under all circumstances and in all stages of human development. It is the principle: anything goes'.
4. See J. M. Roberts (1985), p. 844.
5. See Mark Mason (1996).
6. See *ibid*.
7. See, for example, Gilles Lipovetsky (1992). Lipovetsky is open to this charge in his celebration of postmodern ethics merely as the denial of responsibility, given the demise of foundational ethics consequent on the postmodern scepticism towards the 'grand narratives' of the Enlightenment and modernity.
8. See especially The unfounded foundation, The unbearable silence of responsibility, and The moral party of two, in Bauman (1993), pp. 74-109.
9. See Levinas, *Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity*, cited by Mark Child, David Williams, Jane Birch, and Robert Brody (1995), p. 189.
10. See John Cottingham (1996), p. 404.
11. See Mason (2000).

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