# Emotivism and the Preparation of Educational Leaders

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In his text, *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre claims that contemporary scholars possess the fragments of a conceptual scheme of morality, but lack the contexts that provide significance for the framework. To illustrate his point, MacIntyre describes three moral disagreements about such issues as war and abortion. He notes that these discussions proceed in rational steps from their premises. Unfortunately, there is no universal principle that people could use to measure the premises against each other. Instead, each individual has to adopt his or her premises as the basis of any choice. For this reason, MacIntyre contends that contemporary moral claims are the preferences of the speakers. He called this approach to morality emotivism.[1]

According to MacIntyre, the key element of the social content of emotivism is the obliteration of distinctions between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations. To explain this point, MacIntyre contrasts Kantian ethics with emotivism.

To treat people as ends implies explaining why a particular course of action is good and allowing them to make their own decisions. Under emotivism, manipulating the other person to agree is acceptable because the guiding principle is the psychology of persuasion, not ethics.[2]

Emotivism plays an important role in modern bureaucracies. This happens when managers portray themselves as experts who can make objective decisions to solve organizational difficulties. They derive power and influence from their claims to have the skills to make things run smoothly; however, this is a fiction because those skills derive from sketchy information about human relations that does not lead to predictable outcomes. Nonetheless, the assertion disguises the fact that the managers' decisions reflect their personal preferences. For MacIntyre, the managerial pretention to effectiveness becomes a moral concept when the members of the organization have to follow the decisions.[3]

Although MacIntyre acknowledges that his criticisms of managers sound extreme, a survey of the literature written to prepare people to become school principals suggests that these administrative texts matched MacIntyre's complaints. The texts concentrated on technical skills that the authors claim to have been effective; however, there was little evidence that this was true. Further, the authors of these texts did not provide careful explanations of the nature of ethics, yet they suggested that school leaders acted morally when they applied the technical skills.

MacIntyre notes that the concern for effective organization is a modern affectation. This is the case with school administration. In his book, *Why Teachers Organized,* Wayne Urban places the origins of the rise of a science of educational administration at the end of the nineteenth century when reformers, such as Nicholas Murray Butler of Columbia University, campaigned in many cities against the local or ward control of schools.[4]

Following the success of such campaigns, Ellwood P. Cubberley published in 1916 his book, *Public School Administration: A Statement of the Fundamental Principals Underlying the Organization and Administration of Public Education*. Cubberley designed the book as a text for courses about educational administration that he taught at Teachers College and later at Stanford University. According to J. Eagle Shutt, the book *Public School Administration* was a landmark for a new field of study arguing for technically trained educators, improved teacher training, and increased educational efficiency.[5]

In 1923, Cubberley published a manual for principals. He felt it was appropriate for universities, colleges, and normal schools to offer courses preparing people for the job of principal because school districts had developed sufficient numbers of common experiences that illustrated the techniques such officials needed. To determine the skills a principal needed, Cubberley borrowed an idea from industry called job analysis that called for listing the responsibilities of a position and teaching someone to perform each of the tasks. Under this scheme, Cubberley concentrated on an almost infinite list of mundane tasks and obligations that principals had to complete. For example, Cubberley listed ordering supplies, promoting and transferring classes, and supervising teachers. Cubberley concentrated on such details as how to conduct a class visit, what to do to prepare for the visit, how to enter the room, and how to greet the teacher. He gave examples of charts to organize class visits, and suggested how principals could conduct conferences with the teachers.[6]

Two omissions illustrate Cubberley's reliance on emotivism. First, he presented the need to attend to managerial details of administration as if there was no alternative. Second, he urged prospective principals to read and study educational philosophy, but he did not discuss any educational philosophies or explain the philosophical justifications for any of his suggested administrative strategies. Instead, he relied on his assertion that school districts had developed sufficient numbers of common experiences to illustrate the techniques such officials needed to use.

Cubberley's model dominated educational administration until some educators asked school leaders to think more broadly. For example, in 1934, Jesse Newlon portrayed educational administration as serving as social policy. Writing during the Great Depression, Newlon recommended that administrative decisions should reflect approaches to social problems. To Newlon, this meant that people should take collective actions to solve the economic difficulties. The problem was that the ideal of efficiency made it conflict with democracy. Newlon urged educational administrators to devise policies for governing large schools that included democratic elements.[7]

One suggestion that Newlon made was to form committees made up of teachers in order to shape the curriculum. To make such efforts part of the teachers' work, he scheduled time in the school day for them to meet. Newlon retained aspects of centralized authority by establishing a permanent curriculum department in his

administration. The logic behind Newlon's approach depended on the belief that school organization should reflect a pattern of democratic problem solving. Significantly, Newlon's faith in democracy influenced administrators during the 1930s and 1940s. According to Lynn G. Beck and Joseph Murphy, several texts followed his prescriptions.[8]

The faith in collective action did not conform to any universal ethical principle and there was little evidence it was most important. Not surprisingly, several prominent texts continued to urge principals to devote attention to efficient management. In his 1941 text, *The Principal at Work,* George Kyte presented the principal's role as directive. Although Kyte recommended that teachers form committees to determine course content, he recommended that the principal be the chairperson of subject-matter curriculum committees and of the general curriculum committee that oversees the committees' work. For Kyte, the principal should facilitate the work by recommending references, suggesting persons to interview, and proposing ways to test ideas. Kyte contended that the principal's efforts were helpful because he or she had read the relevant materials about the course of study before the meetings and knew the direction they should pursue.[9]

Kyte's wish for teachers to follow the instructions of a strong leader dominated administrative literature throughout the 1950s. David Tyack and Elizabeth Hansot suggest that this happened because the political arrangements allowed administrators to direct the teachers. They note that superintendents and school boards enjoyed considerable autonomy. Federal and state governments or community pressure groups did not interfere with educational practices. School board elections lacked conflict, and teachers did not utilize collective bargaining. The most pressing problems involved providing facilities for increased student enrollments. Tyack and Hansot imply that practical conditions overshadowed concerns about ethical approaches.[10]

During the 1960s, social protests, the civil rights movement, and increased federal activism changed the job of school principals. According to Thomas Sergiovanni and Robert Starrat, those social forces changed the nature of school administration, asking school principals to distinguish between administration as a method of working, and supervision as a process that involved almost everyone in the school. The principal could do some tasks, such as forming a master schedule, with one or two helpers. Other aspects, such as improving the effectiveness of an educational program, were supervisory because they required principals to work cooperatively with several other people. Sergiovanni and Starrat claimed principals should use social science research about human relations to work with teachers to improve instruction.[11]

In making their observation about supervision, Sergiovanni and Starrat affirm MacIntyre's observation that managers depend on social psychology to offer methods of bringing people together to work on a common task. When Sergiovanni and Starrat spoke of administration as a reflective practice, they meant that administrators used scientific findings to inform their intuition so they could react to situations from their instincts. Ethical principles did not play a role.[12]

Although Sergiovanni did not rely on ethical study, he claimed his model is ethical because it spread the basis of the principals' authority among the teaching faculty. Sergiovanni disagreed with the then-current model of the principal as the instructional leader who acts as taskmaster, implementing specific rules to improve the school. For Sergiovanni, a better approach is for principals to approach schools as communities where teachers feel empowered to make changes. This means the principals should encourage the development of a sense of collegiality among the teachers, elicit a set of shared sentiments, and become stewards of the shared sentiments. By way of example Sergiovanni described a principal who encouraged teachers to become leaders in finding ways to increase instructional effectiveness. The principal did this by developing the teachers' commitment to fulfill the children's needs. Sergiovanni wanted the principal to measure teachers' commitments to core values in personnel evaluations and to express outrage against teachers who ignored the values.[13]

When Elizabeth Campbell reviewed Sergiovanni's *Moral Leadership,* she complained that he based his approach on the needs, preferences, and beliefs of the people in the school communities. She noted that Sergiovanni disparaged any reference to an objective value that controlled the subjective wishes of the people. She complained that Sergiovanni made a person's personal vision the criterion determining moral leadership. She added that his call for a consensus to arise among teachers did not correct the dangers. Campbell warned that Sergiovanni's efforts to force a commitment to some ideal were morally empty because they had no reference to objective principles of right and wrong.[14]

Critics might contend that Sergiovanni fell into illogic when he spoke about collegiality and community by building a system to enforce allegiance because he treated the teachers as employees and not members of democratic communities. MacIntyre makes the more interesting suggestion that Sergiovanni overlooked the proper aim. Since each actor has his or her own purposes, the administrative aim should be to ensure that the institution is the scene of fruitful conflicts because people determine what their purposes are in a free marketplace of ideas.[15]

Although Campbell called for school administrators to refer to objective ethical principles, practicing administrators disparaged the formal study this would require. For example, in the 1990s, the Louisiana Department of Education adopted seven standards for school leaders. One of the standards referred to ethics. It had eight performance indicators, such as modeling ethical behavior, respecting the rights of others, and minimizing personal bias. When Spencer J. Maxcy and his colleagues asked school principals in Louisiana to rank these standards in order of usefulness, the majority of principals ranked the standard about ethics as the most important. When Maxcy asked them which area should receive the most attention during training, they gave the ethics standard the lowest priority.[16]

Although school administrators saw little value in the academic study of ethics, university-based training programs paid more attention to ethics and administration. For example, in 1981, Robin H. Farquhar surveyed 50 institutions that belonged to

the U.S. University Council for Educational Administration. He found that the subject attracted little interest on the campuses. By 1992, when Lynn Beck and Joseph Murphy replicated Farquhar's study, they found increasing interest in presenting preparation in ethics to prospective administrators.[17]

Philosophers of education took advantage of the need to offer practical approaches to ethics in education. For example, in 1988, Kenneth Strike, Emil Haller, and Jonas Soltis, offered a system to inspire readers to think through problems in educational administration with their text, *The Ethics of School Administration*. The process began with a fictional case study the authors constructed. These stories were moral dilemmas that lacked right or wrong answers. The authors wrote these cases in ways that encouraged the readers to put themselves into the situations and to express initial reactions. The second step was a section the authors called a dispute where they offered some ethical considerations in a conversational format. In the third step, the authors laid out the ethical concepts that they drew from two contrasting schools of thought. They labeled one position consequentialist because the views within this perspective considered the results to be most important. They called the other position non-consequentialist because these views depended more on moral ideals than on the effects of actions. Finally, they offered a section they called analysis where they discussed the logic of ethical reasoning.[18]

Strike, Haller, and Soltis justify their process in simple terms. Although they contend that moral intuitions are central to ethical decisions, they caution that those feelings of right and wrong do not provide dependable guidance. To develop more sophisticated, objective approaches, people have to describe the moral concepts that gave rise to those feelings. They should describe and analyze those concepts and test those feelings in some way. For Strike, Haller, and Soltis, the aim of such exercises is reflective equilibrium. This is a point where a person's moral intuitions balance with the moral theories that account for them and where the theories justify the decisions the person makes. Since this process is similar to the scientific method, the process might begin anew if the person encounters different evidence or hypotheses.[19]

Strike, Haller, and Soltis have a pragmatic reason for making intuition central to the process of reasoning. They believe that this enlists the desires of the readers to act morally. Central to these intuitions is the act of empathy. They add that the ability to empathize with other people enables someone to want to do the right thing because personal feelings provide the motives for actions.[20]

Despite the assertion of Strike, Haller, and Soltis, philosophers do not agree that moral concepts give rise to emotions and feelings. For example, when MacIntyre describes the Enlightenment Project, or Kant's part in it, he considers it an attempt to discover rational rules of morality. Rather than depend on intuition to discover an objective basis of morality, MacIntyre borrows from Aristotle's descriptions of the virtues to call for a concern for historical traditions and a search for unity in life.

Nonetheless, even critics praise the book by Strike, Haller, and Soltis as a teaching aid. According to Robert Heslep, a valuable aspect of the book is the

arrangement of each chapter, which focuses on a concept, such as individual liberty, and presents fictional cases to illustrate dilemmas related to that theme. Heslep added that students loved the cases, but he argued that Strike, Haller, and Soltis mixed topics when they explained the process of moral reasoning. For example, they confused duties and obligations, they conflated preferences and values, and they confused moral judgments and value judgments. Most important, Heslep claimed Strike, Haller, and Soltis gave a superficial explanation of their ethical theory. For example, they offered two sets of principles: benefit maximization or consequentialism, and equal respect or non-consequentialism. In one place, the authors made these principles dependent on each other. In another place, they wrote that one principle was subordinate to the other.[21]

When Beck and Murphy conducted their study mentioned above, they found another problem with ethics instruction that might apply to Strike, Haller, and Soltis's book. Although Beck and Murphy wanted university-based training programs to include more concern for the ethics of educational administration, they feared that these programs would reduce ethics to a set of techniques that administrators had to master. This was a danger because programs of vocational preparation sought to simplify and control the ambiguities people inevitably encountered.[22]

MacIntyre might raise another objection to Strike, Haller, and Soltis's book. In this regard, it is important to recall that MacIntyre complained that under emotivism it is acceptable to treat the ends as given and to manipulate people to accept the constraints imposed by the system. To some extent, Strike, Haller, and Soltis's text presents a technique that enables prospective administrators to develop their powers of persuasion to convince people to accept things that are not in their interests. An example appears in a case in their text that involves parents who want their children to move to the classroom of a well-respected teacher. In this case, the dominant need is to balance class size among the teachers. There does not seem to be any way for the administrator to allow parents to make their own decisions because the institution has its structure. The arguments of serving the needs of most children and the teachers work against treating the children as ends.

Advocates of social justice may not have a way out of emotivism. According to Elizabeth Campbell, educators concerned with such social justice issues tend to present political issues, such as the eradication of the social class divisions, as if they are ethical ones. Campbell lists several terms designating this orientation such as critical theory, critical pedagogy, and critical democratic education. The problem is that this orientation calls for educators to become social activists who work to change society. Not only does this approach treat ethical issues in a cavalier fashion, it can have ironic consequences. Campbell describes a lesson in which a teacher and her students collected money to buy the freedom of slaves in the Sudan. The teacher thought the exercise exemplified ethical concern. Campbell points out that the actions sustained the practice of slavery by making it profitable, and the students derived a self-satisfied sense of righteousness.[23]

Despite criticisms of this nature, some texts on the preparation of school principals recommend including studies of critical pedagogy. For example, John

Hoyle and Mario Torres recommend including readings from the perspective of critical theory to explore ethical issues when they describe how to align programs of educational leadership to the standards the National Policy Board for Educational Administrators' Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) released in 2008. One of the texts that Hoyle and Torres recommend to satisfy standard five, concerning ethics, is Patrick Slattery and Dana Rapp's *Ethics and the Foundations of Education*.[24]

In the text, Slattery and Rapp introduce their readers to a wide range of educational theories. With the theoretical descriptions they offer examples of teachers working for social justice. Nonetheless, Slattery and Rapp do not suggest that their readers choose any one of the theories. Instead, they write the following: "it is important to understand the distinctions between various approaches as we attempt to use ethical systems to inform our moral decisions." In this spirit, they recommend that professors and K–12 educators seek to understand their world while working with individuals and groups to demand peace, tolerance, and acceptance. As an example, they describe a teacher in a rural college who used social advocacy in a speech course. She asked her students to present descriptions of the lives of people they knew who displaced hegemonic, status quo mentalities. Slattery and Rapp contend that this course was a laboratory for social justice wherein the students designed their own visions of social justice.[25]

Campbell's criticism appears correct as related to critical theory approaches similar to that of Slattery and Rapp. The model imposes controversial issues on schools. In fact, Slattery and Rapp begin the book with stories of how they taught a doctoral course in the ethics of leadership using an approach similar to the one in their book. They contend that they had several problems with students who "reacted from positions of homophobia, sexism, racism, and religious intolerance." They add that college administrators supported the students.[26]

For the purpose of this essay, the problem with Slattery and Rapp's approach is that they describe ethical decisions as matters of personal choice and people who disagree as in need of conversion. They acknowledge that educators might inform their decisions with ideas from established sources, but they see the solutions as examples of personal commitment. This is a problem because, once people define ethical behavior as a choice, there is no reason to oppose racism other than that it is personally distasteful. Although universal and objective truth may not be readily accessible, Slattery and Rapp do not recognize that morality should be more than a choice.

As this essay has shown, Slattery and Rapp are part of the general direction of authors writing about professional ethics for educational administrators. The texts designed to introduce school administrators to ethical deliberation reduce it to personal choice because they cannot offer any universal principle against which people can measure competing claims. Although MacIntyre argues that remedies for emotivism might come from careful and serious consideration of the works of Aristotle, he contends that many of the practical problems with emotivism would disappear if managers acted with humility. He notes that administrators often claim

that they perform modest functions with some competence and that they recognize the limits of the knowledge about human relations. Unfortunately, MacIntyre found this to be false modesty. Managers continue to claim extensive power, authority, and rewards indicating they do not recognize that administrative competence is an illusion.[27]

1. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 6–21.

2. Ibid., 22, 23.

3. Ibid., 71–75.

4. Wayne J. Urban, *Why Teachers Organized* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), 25–29.

5. J. Eagle Shutt, "Ellwood Cubberley (1868–1941): Education and Career, Contribution," http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1893/Cubberley-Ellwood-1868-1941.html.

6. Ellwood P. Cubberley, *The Principal and His School: The Organization, Administration, and Supervision of Instruction in an Elementary School* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1923), v–15, 33–45.

7. Jesse H. Newlon, *Educational Administration as Social Policy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), 230–245.

8. Craig Kridel, "Newlon, Jesse Homer," in *Historical Dictionary of American Education,* ed. Richard J. Altenbaugh (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 259–260; and Lynn G. Beck and Joseph Murphy, *Understanding the Principalship, Metaphorical Themes, 1920s–1990s* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993), 35.

9. George C. Kyte, *The Principal at Work* (New York: Ginn and Co., 1941), 311–330.

10. David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820–1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 217–219.

11. Thomas J. Sergiovanni and Robert J. Starrat, *Emerging Patterns of Human Supervision: Human Perspectives* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1971), 1–13.

12. Thomas J. Sergiovanni, *The Principalship: A Reflective Practice Perspective* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1987), xi–xviii.

13. Thomas J. Sergiovanni, *Moral Leadership: Getting to the Heart of School Improvement* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992), xi–xvii, 74–75, 119–128.

14. Elizabeth Campbell, "Raising the Moral Dimension of School Leadership," *Curriculum Inquiry* 25, no. 1 (1995): 87–99.

15. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 153.

16. Spencer J. Maxcy, *Ethical School Leadership* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2002), 27–29.

17. Lynn G. Beck and Joseph Murphy, *Ethics in Educational Leadership Programs: An Expanding Role* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 1994), 33–54.

18. Kenneth A. Strike, Emil J. Haller, and Jonas F. Soltis, *The Ethics of School Administration,* 3rd edition (New York: Teachers College Press, 2005), ix–xii, 5.

19. Ibid., 110–111.

20. Ibid., 112.

21. Robert D. Heslep, "Essay Review: The Philosophical Dialogue on Ethics and Education," *Educational Studies* 20, no. 3 (1989): 233–247.

22. Beck and Murphy, *Ethics in Educational Leadership Programs*, 79–96.

23. Elizabeth Campbell, "Teaching Ethically as a Moral Condition of Professionalism," in *Handbook of Moral and Character Education,* eds. Larry P. Nucci and Darcia Narvaez (New York: Routledge, 2008), 601–617.

24. John R. Hoyle and Mario S. Torres, Jr., *Six Steps to Preparing Exemplary Principals and Superintendents* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 72–75.

25. Patrick Slattery and Dana Rapp, *Ethics and the Foundations of Education: Teaching Convictions in a Postmodern World* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003), 66–67, 276–279.

26. Ibid., 9–11.

27. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 102.