For parents, educators, and policymakers, Kilpatrick's hard-hitting and controversial book will not only open eyes but change minds. He maintains that by stressing feelings rather than good behavior, schools and parents have failed to instill moral values in our youth.

My Personal Review:
or decades a swelling chorus of journalistic lament and breastbeating has decried the lack of morality in America. Whether one considers the Charles Keating-style con-artists who subverted the Savings and Loan industry or beholds the teenagers "wilding" and "whirlpooling" in our urban jungles, something is clearly askew in America's morality. But exactly what's lacking, exactly why we're so troubled, is generally more obscured than clarified in TV and newspaper presentations.
To help remedy this vacuum in the public's understanding, a professor of education at Boston College, William Kilpatrick, has published Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong: Moral Illiteracy and the Case for Character Education (New York: Simon and Schuster, c. 1992), providing a probing and disquieting analysis.

What we face is a crisis of moral illiteracy which overrides the crisis of cultural illiteracy (or simple illiteracy, for that matter). We live in a society where increasing numbers of men and women have little sense of propriety, minimal confidence in moral standards beyond their own personal constructions, no belief in moral absolutes. In part, this results from the growing influence the popular media, especially music and television, exert on impressionable youngsters. Far more deeply than the precepts of parents, teachers or preachers, the media saturate the minds and shapes the hearts of our kids. In the judgment of Kenneth Myers, a TV critic, "Television is . . . not simply the dominant medium of popular culture, it is the single most significant shared reality in our entire society. . . . In television we live and move and have our being" (p. 264).
In addition, today’s moral decay results from secular educators' misguided efforts to "teach" morality through non-directive strategies such as "values-clarification." Drawing upon the work of psychologists such as Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, who emphasized non-directive counseling techniques and the importance of "self-actualization," educators sought to elicit moral standards through free-flowing group discussions and subsequent individual decisions. (Importantly, Maslow disavowed much that popularizers did with his "self-actualization" insights. He insisted his approach, rightly understood, applies only to adults, for youngsters have not "learned how to be patient; nor have they learned enough about evil in themselves and others . . . nor have they generally become knowledgeable and educated enough to open the possibility of becoming wise; nor have they generally acquired enough courage to be unpopular, to be unashamed about being openly virtuous, etc." (p. 33).)

But educators dashed ahead, undeterred by Maslow’s considered caution. They insisted on treating children as adults (as moral decision makers) and proceeded on the assumption that freeing the young to clarify their "feelings" on various issues would enable them to live rightly. Could children only "feel good" about themselves they would then "feel right" about moral issues and thus "do good." So elementary teachers, one researcher found, "are being taught to concern themselves with children's feelings of self worth and not with the worth of hard work . . ." (p. 41). To deal with the problem of drug abuse, for example, "drug education" programs such as "Smart," "Here's Looking at You," and "Quest," were instituted. The "experts" who directed such programs proposed to "facilitate" discussions which would enhance "self-esteem" and automatically equip teens to deal wisely with addictive substances. Unfortunately, follow-up studies reveal that such drug education programs almost unfailingly lead to increased drug experimentation rather than avoidance. It seems that in free-flowing group discussions, youngsters doing drugs or experimenting with alcohol appear more adventurous and grown-up than their peers; they are often more assertive in such discussions, giving their views a more authoritative air; they rarely admit, if they even understand, the potentially disastrous consequences of their behavior. The "facilitating" teacher, refusing to impose norms, ends up allowing the drug education class to encourage experimentation!

The same applies to sex education. (I’ve developed a positively Pavlovian presentiment whenever I hear discussions which deal with this nation's sexual chaos--"more education" is always proposed as its sole solution!) Yet the more sex education classes we institute in the public schools the more unrestrained and self-destructive becomes our young peoples' sexual behavior. Indeed, "a Lou Harris poll, commissioned by Planned Parenthood, revealed that teenagers who had had comprehensive sex education had significantly higher rates of sexual activity than their peers who had not had sex education" (p. 54). Amazingly, in the state of Virginia, "school districts that instituted comprehensive sex education showed a 17 percent increase in teen
pregnancies, while schools that were not teaching it had an average of 16 percent decrease during the same period” (p. 54).

This becomes understandable when you consider the materials used in sex education classes. Consider the message of a text used in junior high and high school, Changing Bodies, Changing Lives: “’If you feel your parents are overprotective . . . or if they don’t want you to be sexual at all until some distant time, you may feel you have to tune out their voice entirely’” (p. 53)

So ignore your parents! Ignore your religious instruction as well: ”‘Many Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Muslims believe sex outside marriage is sinful,’ says Changing Bodies. ”You will have to decide for yourself how important these massages are for you!” (p. 53). The adults kids should trust, it seems, are limited to educators and authors of sex education texts! What one learns (or should learn) from the failure of such programs is clear: you don’t “teach” morality through non-directive values-clarification bull-sessions, which do little more than elicit random ”feelings” concerning proper behavior. In actual class discussions, teachers have discovered students are as likely to ”feel” that cheating in class is as OK as sleeping around— an unexpected turn of events which usually displeases teachers more than the sexual permissiveness which they often applaud!

Educators looking for an alternative to the ”values clarification” approach have often embrace the ”critical thinking” or ”moral reasoning” exercises proposed by Lawrence Kohlberg and his co-horts; yet they too fail to actually establish morality. The Socratic method, as adopted by Kohlberg (ignoring the fact that Plato reserved such strategies for folks above the age of 30) poses ethical ”dilemmas” which encourage students to weigh the options and reach rational conclusions. His ”moral reasoning” assumes the reality of Kant’s ”categorical imperative”--an accurate, universal, inner ”sense of ought” which gives all persons moral guidance. Posing questions, in the manner of Socrates, enables students to think and make decisions of ethical consequence with confidence. Having often used this approach, I know how effectively it gets students” attention and engenders discussion. We all like to debate hypothetical situations. Yet, even for college students, I confess that ”After being faced with quandary after quandary of the type that would stump Middle East negotiators, students will conclude that right and wrong are anybody”s guess. They will gain the impression, as Cornell professor Richard Baer has pointed out, ”that almost everything in ethics is either vague or controversial . . . ”” (p. 85).

Remarkably, Kohlberg ultimately admitted the limitations of his own method. After trying to implement moral reasoning in actual students, Kohlberg confessed that ”’the educa

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