

When philosophy goes begging in society

By Jon Rappoport, nomorefakenews.com, 19 April 2019

"So Jones, according to you, society should be all about Love. (laughter in the classroom) No, this is important. In fact, looking at some of your gruff mugs, my dear students, I'd say some of you could use a good dose of Love. All right, Jones, how is this spread of Love accomplished? In schools, you say? So, what is taught in the classes? No, not generally taught. Spell it out. Your job is to figure out exactly how you teach Love. Since it's the most important thing to you, you need to find out how you impart it. You can't just say leave it to the experts. That would be like me saying what I want the most for the world is to turn into a Utopia, and we'll do that through universal education centers, where people in charge who know how to accomplish this goal practice their skills. I do nothing. I just watch Utopia happen. ----No, you need to become a teacher of what you think is most important. What do you teach in order to impart Love? How do you do it? You program it into people? Is that what you're advocating? What about the students who don't want to be programmed? Is something wrong with them? Is freedom important?...Start talking, Jones, I'm listening..."

In 1960, I graduated from college with a BA in philosophy. One of the most glaring deficiencies was a lack of exploration of ethical values.

The famed dormitory "bull sessions" among students rarely, if ever, took place. In the classroom, there was never a wide-ranging discussion of students' own values.

Creating a civilization in which ethics take centre stage is, at best, a difficult proposition. If education doesn't include a probing search for answers on this subject; if instead, it's assumed that every person has his own relative point of view, then of course you end up with mobocracy and quite heavy propaganda. Ultimately, elites take charge of the propaganda.

A version of the Socratic Method should infiltrate college classrooms to the core. What are your most important beliefs? How would you implement these beliefs in society, if you could? What would that look like? What would be the implications of a society governed by your beliefs? Spell them out. What would constitute the unforeseen results? How would you deal with these results?

These and other questions draw out the students. They begin to reflect. They learn how to think about their own ethical values. They encounter other sets of values. They respond to these differing pictures of reality. They come up against the question of individual freedom and what it means in practice. They compare what they believe with other basic beliefs---for example, the American Constitution's. Or Plato's Republic. Or Marx's Communist Manifesto. Or the students who sits two chairs away.

A real teacher knows how to initiate and preside over such discussions. These classes become interesting, exciting, vital, energizing.

In a modern "democracy," where this sort of education never occurs at a deep level, propaganda eventually becomes all inclusive, and one side seeks to shut down the other---which is what we are seeing now.

The process of education itself is devalued because it isn't impacting the student at his centre. It's superficial to the extreme, and it rarely brings about vital personal change. Instead, at best, the student is viewed as a robot who needs to ingest information. I'm not downplaying the role of information; I'm saying it needs to be supplemented by an ongoing process of reflection on, consideration of, and extensive dialogue about, personal values.

Schools that feature true values-education need to be created from scratch. Obviously, this is no easy job. It might be the hardest job in a society that has already sunk into half-light indifference on multiple fronts. However, I can tell you from experience that there are many families who want what I'm suggesting for their children; they just don't know where to go. They don't want their children to take on a set of values by belonging to some group who will, supposedly, protect them and give them legitimacy. They want their children to be able to stand on their own two legs and live according to their best ideas.

This is what a so-called "liberal education" is really all about.

"All right, Smith, you keep referring to Justice as a core value. You've read at least part of Plato's Republic. You know he believed that Justice, as well as many other core concepts, already existed on a higher level of reality. What do you think of that? Give us 800 written words on the subject. I don't want vague generalities. And give us your own experience. What is Justice to you? How did you decide what it is? Did you discover it? Did you invent it? Do we all need to have the same notion of Justice? If so, what would society then look like? How would it function? Who would run things? Would a few people be born with a higher understanding of Justice? We'll have a full discussion of your ideas. But we need to know what those ideas are, specifically...Maybe it's time to remind you that I want at least some of you, when you graduate, to go out into the world with the solid ambition of bringing your best values into wider existence, for real, in this thing called Life. We're not only doing academics here. We're doing preparation. I refuse to allow the preparation to be flimsy and separate from you. It has to reflect deep parts of you. You're not going to forget what you did here the minute you walk out the classroom door for the last time..."

In society, there are those who consider ethics a sport, a game to be taken lightly. There are those who have no ethical values at all, beyond their personal ambitions. There are those who buy the values of their elders, without thought, and thereby close the book on the whole subject. Worst of all, there are individuals who have a massive commitment to impose their values on everyone else but have never truly reflected on the negative implications of a civilization which accepts their version of life. They seek power, and they take it, no matter the consequences.

One of the great roles of education---and philosophy in particular---is to bring true personal engagement into the field of ethics. This would be accomplished despite widespread resistance and apathy, and despite a feeling that nothing can be changed.

Resistance is always present. It is no reason to abandon the work.